

What Is the Gospel? (Part 3)

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2023 Passion Week / Gospel; Christ; Sin; Resurrection; Grace / 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 teaches us what is the gospel.

Scripture

The text we have been considering for our 2023 Passion Week is [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#).

Let us read [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#):

¹ Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹ Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

Introduction

Jesus is arguably the most significant person in all of human history. He is the central figure of Christianity.

But what exactly are the core beliefs of Christianity? What is the essence of Christianity?

Paul wrote in verses 1-2a, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.” According to Paul, the core of Christianity—the essence of Christianity—is the gospel.

[1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#) teaches us what is the gospel.

The Greek word for “gospel” (*euangelion*) means “good news.” In ancient times, a messenger would go into the town square and shout important news for the people to hear.

After a battle was won by the Greeks, a messenger would be sent to announce in the town square, “We triumph! There has been a victory that has saved us from slavery!” That was *euangelion*. That was gospel. That was “good news.”

Paul used the word “gospel,” as did the other Biblical writers, to announce the core Christian message.

In essence, the good news—the gospel—is that a battle has been fought and won, and now we are free from slavery. And that battle has been fought and won by Jesus Christ.

The core of Christianity is the good news that something has happened in history. It is by that historical action that a person is saved.

There are four parts to the gospel. Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Gospel Is about Christ (15:3a)
2. The Gospel Is about Sin (15:3b)
3. The Gospel Is about the Resurrection (15:4-8)
4. The Gospel Is about Grace (15:10)

Review

Earlier in this Passion Week, we examined the first two parts. Let’s review them very briefly today. And then we shall look at the final two parts of the gospel.

I. The Gospel Is about Christ (15:3a)

First, the gospel is about Christ.

Paul wrote in verse 3a, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ...”

For Paul, the gospel was summed up in Christ. Everything in the text explains Christ. It points to Christ. It is found in Christ.

On that first Good Friday, Christ died to pay the penalty for sin. Three days later, on Easter Sunday morning, he was raised back to life by the Father.

It is in this sense that Christianity is different from every other religion in the world. Every religion in the world—and I mean *every* religion—teaches that you must do something to earn salvation. Every religion teaches what you must do to be saved.

Christianity is completely different. It says that Christ has *done* what you and I cannot *do*.

Only Christianity teaches that Christ has won salvation for his people.

That is the good news of the gospel.

But what is it that Christ has done for our salvation?

II. The Gospel Is about Sin (15:3b)

Second, the gospel is about sin.

Paul wrote in verse 3b, “... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.”

We live in a world of brokenness and pain and suffering. All that is wrong in the world is because of sin.

Sin causes a barrier between God and us. God will not fellowship with us because we are alienated from him because of our sins.

Do you remember when you were a teenager? Your Mom or Dad told you to clean your room. You didn't. Did you get into trouble? Of course, you did!

Why? Because you disobeyed your parent.

Now, suppose your parent told you to wash the family car. Instead of washing the car, you decided to drive it around the block. And unfortunately, you crashed into the neighbor's car. You totaled both cars.

Now what is going to happen to you? You are in trouble with your parents, your neighbor, and the police. Your parents will probably ground you for a year and all your allowance money is going to have to pay off the debt.

Our alienation from God is infinitely greater. We have broken God's commands countless times. There is a massive debt that we owe to God.

We deserve to go to hell for all eternity because we have broken God's law.

That is what Christ came to remedy. The good news—the gospel—is that God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to pay our penalty for our disobedience and sin.

Jesus died for our sins so that we might live.

Lesson

This brings us to our lesson for today.

There are two more parts to the gospel.

III. The Gospel Is about the Resurrection (15:4-8)

Third, the gospel is about the resurrection.

Paul wrote in verses 4-8, "... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

The resurrection of Jesus is essential to the gospel. John Stott put it well when he said, "Christianity is in its very essence a resurrection religion. The concept of the resurrection lies at its heart. If you remove it, Christianity is destroyed."

Why is the resurrection so important?

Because the resurrection is the assurance that everything that Jesus said about himself is true. For example, Jesus said:

- “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” ([Matthew 12:40](#)).
- “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise” ([Mark 9:31](#)).

Now some people don't believe that Jesus did rise from the dead. Over the millennia, there have been all kinds of arguments about why Jesus could not have risen from the dead.

One argument is that Jesus did not die. They say that Jesus merely fainted from exhaustion. The ignorant, ancient people thought he was dead and so they buried him. When he was in the cool tomb, he revived and recovered. His followers mistakenly thought that he had recovered from death and so they promoted the story of his resurrection.

The problem with this view is that a professional Roman killer certified that Jesus was dead on the cross. He was stabbed in the chest and water and blood came out of his wound, indicating that he was dead.

Moreover, Jesus was tightly wrapped in burial cloths and seventy-five pounds of spices. Even if he had still been alive when he was buried, which he wasn't, he would never have survived the suffocating wrapping and spices.

Another argument that Jesus did not die is that Jesus did not die on the cross. Someone else took his place and died instead of Jesus. Three days later, Jesus showed himself and pretended to be resurrected from the dead.

However, this argument doesn't hold water because that was never asserted at the time of Jesus' resurrection.

A third argument against Jesus' resurrection is that Jesus' followers were hallucinating. They asserted that Jesus was alive after his death and burial, but they were hallucinating.

The problem with that view is that scores of people don't have the same hallucination. After stating in verse 4 that Jesus was "raised on the third day," Paul went on to list all the people to whom Jesus appeared alive: "Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time.... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all,... he appeared also to me" (vv. 5-8). Paul listed all these people because he invited skeptics to double-check with them that they had seen Jesus alive again after he died.

And a fourth argument against Jesus' resurrection is that Jesus' disciples fabricated a lie. Proponents of this argument say that Jesus really died but he never did rise again from the dead. His disciples remembered what Jesus had said about his resurrection from the dead, and so, after three days, they went around telling everyone that Jesus was alive.

This argument can also be easily refuted. Had Jesus still been dead, the authorities could quite easily have gone to the tomb and showed everyone where the body of Jesus was still lying. However, they never did so because there was no body in the tomb. Jesus was alive again!

Another reason this argument doesn't hold up is that the disciples of Jesus never changed their story about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. All of them maintained that conviction for their entire lives.

Chuck Colson was President Richard Nixon's Special Counsel from 1969 - 1970. He was eventually convicted and sentenced to prison for his role in the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon presidency. Later, Colson was converted to Christ. He said:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible! (Hank Hanegraaff, *Afterlife: What You Need to Know about Heaven, the Hereafter & Near-Death Experiences* [New York, NY: Worthy Books, 2013]).

There has never been any credible argument against the resurrection of Jesus.

The great Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said, “The resurrection is a fact better attested than any event recorded in any history, whether ancient or modern.”

So, in what sense is Jesus’ resurrection good news? How does the resurrection of Jesus pay for our sins?

Let me illustrate. When I was a student in South Africa at the University of Cape Town, I went shopping on a very busy Saturday morning. I found myself in a large shopping store that was something like Walmart. I had already purchased some items and was walking around the store looking for something else. A plainclothes policeman came up to me and asked me to go with him to an office in the back of the store. He said that he was with the store’s security department and he was concerned that I might have stolen some items from the store. I was flabbergasted! He left me in the office for about 5 minutes. I was very frustrated and confused. When he returned, I showed him my receipt which proved that I had paid for the items.

In ancient times, when people owed a debt that they could not pay, they were either thrown into prison or enslaved. The only way a person could get out of prison or slavery was when the debt had been paid. When the debt had been paid in full, the person was released from prison or slavery.

Jesus’ resurrection is like a receipt. It is proof that the debt of sin had been paid in full. The wages of sin is death, but when the debt of sin had been paid in full, Jesus burst the bonds of death and was raised back to life. Jesus’ resurrection is proof that the debt of sin had been paid in full.

IV. The Gospel Is about Grace (15:10)

And fourth, the gospel is about grace.

Paul wrote in verse 10, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”

Paul used the word “grace” three times in verse 10. The word “grace” refers to the unmerited favor of God.

Every person has broken God's law. And so every person deserves to be punished for breaking God's law. That punishment is to be cut off from God now and for all eternity.

The only remedy is for God to punish someone else in my place. That is what Jesus did on the cross. He paid the penalty for all my sins. God accepted Jesus' punishment and raised him back to life again.

God extended favor to me that I did not deserve. I deserved to go to hell for all eternity. But he had Jesus suffer in my place. He has forgiven me and accepted me into his family. I did nothing to earn favor with God. And I did nothing to deserve favor with God. It was all unmerited.

One of the great preachers of the last century was Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He used to ask people, "Do you consider yourself to be a Christian?"

Some people would answer, "No." Then he would explain to them how to become a Christian.

And some people would answer, "Yes."

Then Dr. Lloyd-Jones would ask, "Why? Why are you a Christian?"

Often the person would say something like this, "Well, I think I am a Christian because I am trying to live according to the teaching of the Bible." Or, they might say, "I believe I am a Christian because my good deeds outweigh the wrong things I have done in my life."

When Dr. Lloyd-Jones heard something like that, he knew that the person did not understand the core teaching of Christianity. The reason the person did not understand Christianity is that the person did not understand "grace." They were saying, "If I work hard enough, if I try hard enough, God will accept me." They were trusting in their own works.

Now, it is important to understand that every person is saved by works. Those works include 100% obedience to God 100% of the time. It means never committing one single sin—ever! If you can obey God 100% and never commit a single sin, you will be saved.

But we know that "none is righteous, no, not one... no one does good, not even one" ([Romans 3:10-11](#)).

But God will accept the perfect works of one person. That one person is Jesus Christ. Jesus was 100% obedient 100% of the time. He never committed a single sin in thought, word, or deed. His works are accepted by God the Father.

The good news is that God accepts us in Jesus. He imputes the perfect obedience of Jesus to a sinner like me. And Jesus paid the awful penalty for my sins.

And that is grace. Grace is believing that the perfect obedience of Jesus is credited to me and that Jesus took the penalty for my sins.

That is why Dr. Lloyd-Jones said:

It is grace at the beginning, and grace at the end. So that when you and I come to lie upon our deathbeds, the one thing that should comfort and help and strengthen us there is the thing that helped us in the beginning. Not what we have been, not what we have done, but the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, and it ends with grace. Grace, wondrous grace. By the grace of God, I am what I am. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Conclusion

Two weeks ago, on Monday, March 27, 2023, a mass shooting took place at The Covenant School in Nashville, TN. The Covenant School, which is an elementary school with about 200 students, is a ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church, a sister church in our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America.

Six people were killed by the shooter. Three of the dead were nine-year-old students at the school. And three adults were killed.

Every mass shooting is horrifying. But this shooting rattled many of us, primarily I think because it is a sister church in our denomination. It wasn't hard to find people we knew who had connections with the church and school.

The six victims were buried on different days about a week ago.

A few days ago, Metro Nashville Police Chief John Drake provided some personal and emotional perspectives from this past week.

Among his comments to the press, Chief Drake talked about how The Covenant School helped renew his faith after attending victims' funerals. He said:

“As I sat at a church Saturday and I watched students from Covenant School take flowers down to the altar, and literally I’m in tears, and the other first responders, police officers, firefighters, were in tears, and I look at these kids, and they look at us and say thank you for your service.

“They believe that their classmate is going to heaven, that they’re in a better place and they’re not hurting. The ones that were hurting the most was us” (see <https://fox17.com/news/local/nashville-tennessee-middle-tn-mass-shooting-gun-violence-police-chief-john-drake-candidly-reflects-on-covenant-school-shooting-davidson-county-local-news>).

How can these young children who experienced such terrible violence in their young lives believe that their classmate is going to heaven?

It is because they know that their classmate believed the gospel. And it is because they believe the gospel.

They may not have memorized what Paul wrote but they are living what Paul wrote when he said, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved.”

Friends, the core of Christianity is the gospel. And the gospel is about Christ, sin, the resurrection, and grace. I invite you to take your stand on the gospel today. Amen.