

What is the Gospel?

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The Gospel

The Greek word of “gospel” is εὐαγγέλιον (evangelion), which means good news. For modern westerners, “news” carries little significance in its everyday occurrences, whereas the historical word εὐαγγέλιον was far less common and was treated with much more importance. A more appropriate word that carries similar rank today would be “proclamation”. In the context of a first century Greco-Roman world, a culture that Jesus lived in, εὐαγγέλιον was kingly and royalty language. The Calender of Priene, a historical, first century royal announcement of the Roman Emperor, August Ceaser, exemplifies the common usage of εὐαγγέλιον, stating:

Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the εὐαγγέλιον for the world that came by reason of him.¹

The Roman emperors continually decreed that they had brought peace and justice to the world through violent and political power. Unmistakably, the Biblical authors intentionally used the same vocabulary (εὐαγγέλιον) as they proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth, God with us, as the one who brings true peace and justice to the world. Unfortunately, far too many Christians today have deduced the gospel to doing good things and believing the right things in order to go to heaven when they die. This popular held conception of the gospel is completely erroneous and counter to the entire storyline of the Bible. The metanarrative of the Bible is not about going (or not going) somewhere when you die, rather, it is centered on the Creator partnering and dwelling with humanity to rule with Him and on behalf of Him has His image bearers. And even when humanity rebelled by turning to their own demise, God initiated a plan, culminating in Jesus, in

¹ (The Calendar of Priene, Caesar Birthday announcement)

order to restore humanity back to right relationship with Him so we can reside once again with the Creator.

Surely this is how Mark understood it as he opened his book about Jesus, saying “in the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). By most Christians’ definition of the gospel, one would expect Mark to then elaborate on his introduction statement by explaining how to get to heaven or how to avoid hell. Instead, Mark quotes from two Old Testament prophets, Malachi and Isaiah (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3), as if to exclaim to the reader that the good news of Jesus is deeply rooted in a story that is already set in motion, like jumping into an already rushing river.

It is vital not to miss Mark’s point, heavily assisted by Isaiah 40. Isaiah 40 begins with the announcement that Israel’s sins have been paid for and removed (Isa. 40:1-2). Immediately, Mark is identifying that Jesus is the one who paid for the sins of his people through His own atoning, life giving blood. But Isaiah 40 does not stop there, nor does Mark’s purpose for quoting from Isaiah 40, for we have not even gotten to the verses Mark quoted from. As a result of Israel’s iniquity being removed, “a voice of one crying in the wilderness” (this is where Mark quotes from) proclaimed to “make clear the way”, “make smooth in the desert a highway for God” because “here is the Lord our God” (Isa. 40:3-11). God’s return is the good news the Hebrew Scriptures had anticipated.

In the beginning God created the cosmos and it culminated in the creation of humans, whom God tasked to rule and manage, as His images, on His behalf through an unfiltered, unmarred union and relationship with Himself. Quickly enough, Adam and Eve abandoned God’s plan for their own, and story after story, character after character, from Noah to Abraham; to Moses and the Tabernacle; to David and Solomon and the temple; the Bible reveals a faithful

God who worked with and through His rebellious people in order to reign and dwell with them. Eventually, God allowed His peoples' destructive way to overtake them as they were defeated and exiled by other nations. It was at this point in the story that God removed Himself from their presence. Ezekiel 10 records this final departure of God, but before He left, He promised that one day He would return, rescue, and dwell once again with His people. So, for years, decades, and centuries the people of God waited, and it is in this storyline and context that Jesus is introduced.

Mark makes this obvious in verses fourteen and fifteen, claiming that "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news'" (Mark 1:14-15). Throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly states that the good news is the fact that God's kingdom, His presence, has arrived. The good news is not less than the sacrifice of Jesus' life to remove the sins of humanity, but it is undeniably more. New Testament theologian, Grant Macaskill, writes "The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just the entry point into the kingdom of God or the locus for recovery from daily sins but is the very constitution of the kingdom itself. To put it differently, it is not just how we get saved; it is what we are saved into and what we become within that reality."² Jesus' life, death and resurrection not only claimed victory over death and presented his followers as righteous, adopted children; but it inaugurated the return of God himself, the eternal dwelling, ruling and abiding life of Jesus and His Spirit with and through His people.

Personal Testimony

² Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity* (Grand Rapids, MN: Baker Academic, 2019), 41.

I grew up in a Christian house and lived a majority of my formative years as a social and cultural “Christian”. This looked like going to church every Sunday unless, of course, it interfered with sports games. Most of all I knew if I believed in Jesus, I was saved from going to hell. In actuality, this was exactly the extent of my relationship with Jesus. He was my “get out of hell free card” which meant I got to act however I wanted, do whatever I wanted, and live however I wanted as long as I “believed” in Jesus. Consequently, I became the lord, ruler, and king of my own life. It culminated in high school where I would constantly try to hook up with girls or get drunk at parties. I lived to serve my own appetite. Throughout that time though, I longed, deep down, for more. I would wake up after each successful night of partying or successful (most of the time, unsuccessful) night of chasing girls, empty and unfulfilled. The more I sought the thrill, the more unsatisfied I became.

Miraculously, during my freshman year of college, someone gave me a book called *Crazy Love*, by Francis Chan. It is a book all about God’s crazy love for His people and how, after realizing and experiencing God’s immeasurable love, the natural and logic response would be to devote one’s entire life to Him. For me, it dispelled the paradox of a lukewarm Christian, and how Jesus is not only the Savior of the world, but more appropriately, the King. After reading the book, I realized I had a decision to make, go all in following Jesus and make Him Lord of my life, or completely reject Christianity all together because who I was claiming to be, was not at all who I really was. Ultimately, I realized I had been chasing the world and was always left feeling empty, so I decided to “go all in on the Jesus thing” and make Him Lord of my life. That was in 2010, and I have not turned back since.

Soon after I surrendered myself to Jesus and made Him Lord of my life, I met three families who took me in, disciplined me, and showed me what it looked like to follow the way of

Jesus. They showed me how to spend time alone in prayer and reading His word. They taught me how to share my testimony and the good news of Jesus with classmates, sports mates, and strangers. They revealed the truth about a follower of Jesus' new identity as righteous, adopted heirs, royal priest, that is found in and through Jesus and His indwelling Spirit. Above all, these families demonstrated what it looked like to live on mission and intentionally invite others into the intimate relationship and lifelong journey of following Jesus in community. Living as a follower, disciple, and ambassador of Jesus has been the most fulfilling, freeing, and life-giving thing I have ever been part of. So much so that I have dedicated the last fifteen years to sharing teaching, and shepherding friends, families, strangers, neighbors, co-workers, and children towards a relationship with Jesus.

The Role of the Gospel in a Life of a Christian

The gospel has played an integral part of every Christian's life. It serves as a beacon of light that shines bright in the darkness, a refuge for the weak and lowly, and a firm foundation to stand unashamedly upon. While there are numerous roles the gospel has on the life of Christians, three prominent gifts the gospel provides are: new identity, missional living and eternal hope. The gospel provides a new identity that comes from being reconciled to God. It leads those who choose to follow Jesus on a mission to bear witness to Him. And it offers hope for those suffering and experiencing injustices as they navigate the sad state of creation.

A key role of the gospel is its ability to free humanity from their old self and transform them into God's dwelling place. When God returned to His people through Jesus, it not only inaugurated the redemption of mankind, but it also effectively changed the identity of all who put their trust in Jesus. What the prophets could only dream become a reality through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. On the brink of entering the promised land, Moses told Israel that

when God restores His promises, He will circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:6). For the prophet Jeremiah God would do this by establishing His new covenant with them, writing the law on their hearts (Jer. 31:33). Ezekiel adds to this future prophesy that one day, God will give His people a new heart and a new Spirit (Ezek. 36:26). When Jesus offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice, He unveiled the new covenant and changed the aptitude of all who believe in Him.

Paul's writings are saturated with language and imagery of what this reality. Most significantly, he writes in his letter to the churches in Corinth that the gospel radically transforms those who believe into "new creations" (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul is making the claim that all who put their faith and hope in Jesus are re-created into the image bearing humans we were all meant to be because of the gift of Holy Spirit (the way God dwells eternally with humanity). Jesus reconciled those who believe to Him, allowing them to live in right relationship with the Creator and others. This new life in Jesus is not constituted by Christians living as a better versions of their old self, but rather, as completely new creatures, alive and animated by His very life-giving Spirit. Since being filled with God and His Spirit is temple language from the Old Testament, it is no wonder Paul calls the Christians in Corinth "the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16).

The fact that we have been given a new identity because of the gospel, means that we can experience intimate relationship with the Father as adopted sons and daughters. We can boldly approach His throne, blameless before Him because of Jesus. Amen! But being given a new identity was never meant to be experienced apart from living on mission as an ambassador of God's kingdom. In both of Luke's writings and John's gospel, when Jesus gave his disciples Holy Spirit, he tasked them with the mission to bear witness to Him (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:4-8; John 20:21-22). The gospel means that as God's restored image bearers, we can "rule" on behalf of Him, once again. God's original plan for humanity to manage His sacred space and continue

the advancement of His good creation (as opposed to the chaos) is no longer on hold. Many call this the “already, not yet” as we await new creation.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly said He came to bring God’s Kingdom to earth. Just because Jesus’ physical body is no longer present, the mission remains. The truth of the gospel is that the same power that raised Jesus from the grave lives in us. And we, too, can take part in eradicating the hell on earth by being the Spirit filled new creation that partake in advancing God’s presence and God’s kingdom on earth. With the unveiled Spirit indwelling us, we are called to the same ministry of Jesus. From bearing witness of the love of Jesus with family and friends, to boldly healing the sick, lame, and dead, follows of Him are able live every moment of their day on mission.

Living on mission can be dangerous and tough. The book of Acts is filled with story after story of God’s people being physically, emotionally, and spiritually attacked. And it is in those very moments that the gospel allows people to find hope amidst their circumstances, and joy through their suffering. Paul, in his suffering, is able to proclaim that because of the gospel “nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39).

The enemy is alive and active. It has come to steal, kill, and destroy. But all who put their faith and allegiance in Jesus as King must never loose heart. Jesus’ victory of death dismantled the enemies powers. That is why amidst persecution and rejection, Jesus reminded His disciples that they were still able to find peace in Him (John 16:33). The gospel provides Christians with

an eternal, unwavering hope that nothing else in the world can begin to touch. In review, the gospel plays a vital role in the life of all Christians. It allows followers of Jesus to live into their new identity, live on mission as ambassadors of the King, and live with a hope that draws out joy and praise amidst persecution.

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