

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Life of Christ - The Gospel, Mark 1:1
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 12, 2014

We are going to spend some time this morning in a favorite subject of mine. It is a direct teaching of the first chapter of the book of Mark and the unseen but primary purpose of every verse of every book in the Bible. It is the *raison d'être* of the story of God. We read of it in the very first verse of the very first chapter of Mark.

Mark 1:1 - The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Gospel. I spent 30 years of my life dedicated to the simple task of sharing the gospel.

Charles Hodge said, *"The gospel is so simple that small children can understand it, and it is so profound that studies by the wisest theologians will never exhaust its riches."*

And Charles Spurgeon said, *"We have an unchanging gospel, which is not today green grass and tomorrow dry hay; but always the abiding truth of the immutable Jehovah. My soul hangs for time and eternity on Christ, and what he has done. And if your soul also hangs there, it will be saved as surely as mine shall be. And if you are lost trusting in Christ, I will be lost with you and will go to hell with you. I must do so, for I have nothing else to rely upon but the fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived, died, was buried, rose again, went to heaven, and still lives and pleads for sinners at the right hand of God."*

In my ordination interview last February, they asked me simply, straight up, "Dave, what is the gospel?" It is asked of every ordination candidate, regardless of the status of their education or the credentials of their experience. Apparently there is no better question to get to the heart of our understanding of our faith. So I ask you?

What is the Gospel?

'Gospel' is of course the word that refers to 'good news.' The term *gospel* is found ninety-nine times in the NASB (New American Standard Bible). In the Greek New Testament, *gospel* is the translation of the Greek noun *evangelion* (occurring 76 times) "good news," and the verb *evangelizo* (occurring 54 times), meaning "to bring or announce good news." Both words are derived from the noun *angelos*, "messenger." In classical Greek, an *evangelos* was one who brought a message of victory or other political or personal news that caused joy. That both the noun and the verb are used so extensively in the New Testament demonstrate how it developed a distinctly Christian use and emphasis because of the glorious news announced to mankind.

Today, I want to address the question "What is the gospel?" Having a solid grasp of the gospel is critical to understanding the gospel of Mark as we move forward. Perhaps you have heard of a way of describing or presenting the gospel using a technique called the Romans Road. Romans Road creates a path or road toward God by carefully quoting verses out of the book of Romans that summarize God's saving love for humankind. So Roman's Road . . . and it begins by telling us first what the bad news is so that it can flip the equation and then explain what the good news is. The first verse from Romans is found in chapter 3, the 23rd verse;

Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

This first point establishes what we all know to be true if we give it honest thought, we are selfish and self-centered by nature. Humanity is guilty of willfully choosing sin. Sin; an archery term that means "missing the mark." Falling short. Maybe a better way of thinking of it is that regularly we choose to be our own god or worshiping a false god that we hope will save us.

This verse tells us that no one throughout human history has been perfectly holy or somehow earned a place beside God. God is holy by nature and we are unholy by nature. In this day and age though, 'sin' is a bad word. A hate word of sorts. We don't like to be told we are bad. And in an increasingly pluralistic and relativistic post-modern culture, many want to ask, "Who are you to tell me what I am doing is bad?" Without

an understanding of moral absolutes, we all do what is right in our own eyes. And the world is in big trouble! It starts with an understanding of sin. And death.

Romans 6:23a, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This verse tells us that what we earn by this sinful behavior is death. This is the bad news of the garden; "If you eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you will surely die." Today, in an effort to make the gospel more attractive, some are hiding this judgment truth or sugar coating it. Some modern theologians and pastors have pushed back against this final reality by saying everyone gets to heaven. Hell is just a literary construction or mythical euphemism. They doctor the word of God. Sadly, when someone accepts this gospel, there is no saving power behind it.

Pastors perhaps trying to build a large church or sell a book with a feel good message that compromises the truth and that doesn't transform lives and doesn't save lives. It will be tempting in the 21st century to look at certain issues as 'make or break issues' for a church and be tempted to compromise. Come down too hard and we may scare or anger those who need Jesus the most and they will walk away. Frankly, I don't care about the make or break of any one church, not even ours. What I care about is the eternal church of God and boldly telling the word of truth, even about the bad news, so that I can share of the abounding grace of God as humanity's very good news. And the good news starts in this next verse found in Romans 5;

Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

Romans 6:23b, But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that this salvation is offered to us free. Paul writes in his letter to the church in Ephesus that by *grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*⁹ *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* By faith alone in Christ alone. So what is the mechanism that unleashes this salvation for us? It is really quite simple according to Romans 10:9;

Romans 10:9, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

And then we read these verses of assurance;

Romans 10:13 says it again, "for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 5:1, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

There is a summary of this gospel that was an early Christian creed found in 1 Corinthians that once again reminds us that it is all about the risen Christ;

1 Corinthians 15:1-5, 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.

That Christ did in fact die and did in fact rise from that death by the power of the Holy Spirit is the anchor truth on which the other precepts stand.

All that we have been saying has been the gospel, but what is important to realize is that there is more to the gospel;

But is there more to the Gospel!

The first new gospel we might look at is the gospel of Jesus Christ, though it is of course not new at all. We read about it in Mark 1:1 and it is also found in 1 Cor. 9. And there is a similar way of saying it, the gospel of His Son (Romans 1:9).

The gospel of Jesus Christ or the gospel of His Son

The gospel is not just a sequence of steps (say, the "Four Laws" of Campus Crusade or the "Six Biblical Truths" of Quest for Joy). Those are essential. But what makes the gospel "good news" is that it connects a person with the "unsearchable riches of Christ."

There is nothing in itself that makes "forgiveness of sins" good news. Whether being forgiven is good news depends on what it leads to. You could walk out of a courtroom innocent of a crime and get killed on the street. Forgiveness may or may not lead to joy. Even escaping hell is not in itself the good news we long for - not if we find heaven to be massively boring. Where does it lead? That is the question. Whether justification will be good news, depends on the award we receive because of our imputed righteousness. What do we receive because we are counted righteous in Christ? The answer is fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus Christ is the gospel. Jesus Christ is not merely the means of our rescue from damnation; he is the goal of our salvation. If he is not satisfying to be with, there is no salvation. He is not merely the rope that pulls us from the threatening waves; he is the solid beach under our feet, and the air in our lungs, and the beat of our heart, and the warm sun on our skin, and the song in our ears, and the arms of our beloved.

This is why the New Testament often defines the gospel as, simply, Christ. The gospel is the "gospel of Christ" (Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27; etc.). Or, more specifically, the gospel is "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). And even more wonderfully, perhaps, Paul says that the preaching of the gospel is the preaching of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

Therefore to believe the gospel is not only to accept the awesome truths that 1) God is holy, 2) we are hopeless sinners, 3) Christ died and rose again for sinners, and 4) this great salvation is enjoyed by faith in Christ-all good and true of course.

But believing the gospel is also to treasure Jesus Christ as your unsearchable riches. What makes the gospel Gospel is that it brings a person into the everlasting and ever-increasing joy of Jesus Christ. But there is still more when it comes to gospel. There is the gospel of the grace of God.

The gospel of the grace of God

Acts 20:24, ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

It is as though Paul wants us to understand that nothing else matters but this gospel of unmerited favor, a gospel of grace. The free and unexpected and unmerited gift. The words Jesus will speak when we come to heaven are: "Enter into the joy of your Master" (Matthew 25:21). Jesus prayed, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory" (John 17:24). The glory he wants us to see is the "unsearchable riches of Christ." It is "the immeasurable riches of [God's] grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Then there is the gospel of the Kingdom;

The gospel of the kingdom

Matthew 9:35, ³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

This is the good news that God will establish His kingdom on earth through the two advents of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And finally for today there is the gospel of peace;

The gospel of peace

The gospel of peace describes how this good news of salvation in Christ brings peace in all its many aspects (peace with God, the peace of God, peace with others, and world peace) through the victory accomplished by the Savior.

Ephesians 6:15, "and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

What happens when this gospel of peace lives in us?

Well let me tell you a story . . .



Lindsey and Steve Justice

9News website from October 9, 2014-- Seven babies -- a local Charlotte couple was shocked to learn about their pregnancy. Their doctors were terrified. They are as all-American as it gets, Lindsey and Steve Justice. They were college athletes who met at Wake Forest. Lindsey was a soccer player; Steve played college ball. "We're best friends, we're best buds," they say in unison while talking to us on their living room couch.

Married for five years, their life together revolves around their faith and their family: Hannah, the 4-year old doe-eyed daddy's girl, and Hope, the 2-year-old who looks just like her mom. After nine months of trying for a third, Lindsey learned she has PCOS, polycystic ovarian syndrome, which can make it difficult to get pregnant.

"Every month seemed like 10 years. Any woman who goes through infertility knows that," Lindsey says. Lindsey took fertility drugs and the couple considered adoption. "It's just emotionally draining; it's hard, and for me to see her going through it...it's hard for me to watch her go through it." But just when they were thinking about other options, a surprise came; for Steve's 30th birthday, Lindsey handed her husband a gift: her positive pregnancy test.

"From that point on it was just kind of a wild ride."

At the six-week ultrasound, the doctor was concerned. Lindsey remembers, "First thing he says is, 'we have a problem.' I said, 'excuse me?'" Though there had been just one egg, there appeared to be at least three sacks. The doctor thought Lindsey could be carrying as many as six babies, and asked the couple about what's called selective reduction, terminating some of the pregnancies to help give the others a better chance at survival.

"He just said 'this is dangerous. The human body is not meant to carry six-plus babies, and for your health and for the babies--their chances of survival, your best medical option is to selectively reduce.' Steve and I didn't even have to look at each other. That was just not going to be an option."

The surprises kept coming. Lindsey's eight-week ultrasound showed there were in fact seven babies. "We knew at that point, reaffirmed, that this was from God. It's not in our hands. It was a miracle, just a miracle. We were humbled to be counted worthy, although we're very unworthy to carry such a responsibility."

Most OBGYNS don't see this kind of pregnancy ever in their career-- seven is extremely rare. The couple documented the pregnancy, taking home videos almost daily. They knew they had to get to 23 weeks for the babies to have a chance. They named them; the first letter of each baby's name together spells Messiah (Note: One of the 7 was miscarried early in the pregnancy).

But in week 21, Lindsey knew something was wrong--her water broke. "I started to feel some contractions and I wanted to not believe that." The couple rushed to the hospital where Lindsey gave birth to the baby they named Mercy.

"We said goodbye to Mercy, and I was laying on that table for two hours trying to do everything I could in my power, which was nothing, to relax and stop having contractions, but it wasn't God's will," Lindsey says. It took just 10 minutes for Lindsey to give birth to the other five babies.

"She was holding three of them on her chest and I was getting the next two and I just wanted it stopped. I wanted them to stay in there," Steve remembers. "I was sobbing and you're like, can you just stop it?" The babies survived about two hours.

"And what I would give to nurse them, to hold them, to rock them to sleep, to dress them. I want to be their mom, I want them to be here, you know. But that wasn't God's will."

NBC Charlotte asked, "Your biggest chance to save some of them was to reduce. Do you regret the decision now?" Lindsey didn't hesitate. "No. Oh gosh, I haven't even thought about that question. No, I would do the past however many, 21 weeks, again and again and again if I had the choice."

Both say they don't think the full weight of the loss has hit them. "We don't have strength right now, we are broken, and we are in deep mourning. We held each one of our six girls and said goodbye to them. They were all living. They all have birth certificates; they all have a first name a middle name and a last name." They have the blankets that each baby was wrapped in on their bed; they each pick a different one to sleep with every night.

Lindsey and Steve wanted to tell their story because they want people to know despite all they have been through, they are hopeful about the future. They want people to know there can be hope amidst great sorrow.

You can find out much more about their journey on their blog: www.jacojustice.blogspot.com. You'll need the password: HisGlory.

This is what happens when the gospel lives in us.

Pray with me . . .