



# THE GOSPEL

What it is and Isn't

If “evangel” means gospel, as stated in the previous article, than why have one article about evangelism and one about the gospel? The evangelism article focused mostly on action of evangelism, answering the question: what am I, as an evangelist, supposed to do to evangelize. The simple answer to that question is: preach the gospel. So now we will take time this week to focus on the content of the gospel.

There are several components to the gospel that we must understand, but they must be understood under one presupposition. The presupposition is that we are saved by no merit of our own, but only by God’s grace, through faith in Him. Defense of this doctrine should be left for another time, however, I will cite some of the many verses that support this claim.

- “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” – Eph 2:5,8-9
- “The promise comes by faith” – Rom 4:16
- “Since we have been justified through faith, we have a peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Rom 5:1
- “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that

you have eternal life” – 1 John 5:13

- “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned.” John 5:24

## What the Gospel Is

One of the most commonly asked questions about the gospel is: “what do I have to believe?” This question is extremely valid; after all, there are 66 books containing 1,189 chapters that were written by 40 different men over a period of about 1600 years. So when we hear all we need to do to be saved is believe, we think, “believe what!?” Do we have to believe that Adam really was unashamed when he was naked? Do we have to believe that a hundred year old couple conceived a child? Do we have to believe that Jesus healed people and raised dead people? Do we have to believe that John wrote Revelation without the help of illegal substances? Do we have to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

The best way to answer this question is to allow Scripture to answer it for us. I find the clearest articulation of what we are called to believe to be saved is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

“Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I

received I pass on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

At the onset of this paragraph Paul does two things for us. He first makes it clear that he is talking about the gospel, and then says that this gospel that saves us. The clarity here I believe is intentional, for knowing the gospel is of utmost importance. So with that being said, I believe Paul spells out five things that are contained in the gospel, that we are called to believe.

1. The Plan: “According to the Scriptures” – Christ’s death for us was not spontaneous nor was it random. It was premeditated, planned, and hoped for by believers in all ages. He didn’t just decide last minute to jump in front of a bullet for us. He came to this world knowing that he would soon display the ultimate act of love for us. His coming was expected, and his coming was accurate to the prophecies that predicted it
- 2 The Event: “Christ died” – Christ dying shows that the gospel was a literal event that took place in history. It isn’t some made up story that motivates us, it actually happened, which is why it does something for us.
3. The Achievement: “That he was buried” – Christ paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. Being buried shows this payment was completed.

Sin has been paid for and God's wrath has been satisfied.

4. The Offer: "For our sins" – Christ died in our place, for our sins. He was our substitute, not because of anything we have done, but by his grace. The offer is a free gift that we must accept. (If he didn't die for YOUR sins, that his sacrifice does nothing for you, and if he didn't die in our place, then the debt that we owe has not been paid.)

5. The Victory: "He was raised" – It was his death that paid the penalty for us, but it was his resurrection that made him victorious over sin once and for all. Death was a curse from the fall, and by Christ conquering death he displayed that he was conquering sin. Without the resurrection, as Paul states later in 1 Cor. 15, our faith is futile. If you continue reading after the verses quoted above you will find that Paul mentions many of the people that Christ appeared to. Some might ask, do I have to believe that he appeared to James? I believe that the reason Paul lists these people here is to prove that the resurrection actually happened. In a sense he is saying, "if you don't believe me, ask James or Peter, or any other of these people I mention." He is showing that this is an event that those reading the letter can verify through asking other people. If what Paul was saying wasn't true, there is no way this letter would have stood the test of time. The Corinthians would have asked around and thrown the letter away if Paul's claims did not prove to be true.

So to put this simply, the gospel is that God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die in our place, for our sins. He then rose again from the dead to have victory over

sin, so that believing in Jesus we are freely reconciled back to God and given eternal life with him. The verses above give a clear articulation of *what* the gospel is, but leaves a little uncertainty as to the *purpose* of the gospel. Because of this, I wanted to end this section with this essential truth.

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God..." -1Pe 3:18

The reason for what was accomplished on the cross was so that Christ could bring us to God. If we miss this purpose, we miss the gospel, because then the good news of Jesus' coming becomes about something other than God himself.

So in answering "What is the gospel," we respond with:

"God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die in our place, for our sins. He then rose again from the dead to have victory over sin

*so that*

by believing in Jesus we are freely reconciled back to God and given eternal life with him."

### **What the Gospel isn't**

To end this article, I thought I might be helpful to list out a few things that the gospel isn't, in hopes that this will help us better understand what the gospel is.

- The gospel isn't about what we do; it is about what Jesus did.
- The gospel doesn't have prerequisites (baptism, lifestyle change, etc). All you have to do is believe.
- That gospel isn't about prosperity; it is about being reconciled back to God.

- The gospel isn't costly to us, it is free. It is only costly to God.
- The gospel isn't primarily about being saved from something (sin, guilt, etc.), it is about being saved to something (God).
- The gospel isn't politically correct; it is costly, bloody, and controversial.

Now may the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ be good news for those God puts in your life. Share it, and watch it transform lives!