

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

SCRIPTURE

ROMANS 1:16 [ESV]

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.””

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-9 [ESV]

“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, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 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. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

COMMENTARY

The gospel is good news. Literally the word means, “the bringing of good news,” and for many people, this isn’t news at all. Perhaps one of the most common tendencies among Christians is to live as if the gospel has simply become news to them and no longer good news. We’ve heard it several times, we’ve been told the etymology of the word “gospel” and that Jesus died for sinners. For many people the gospel has become a stepping-stone they must get through to reach the greater spiritual truths. However, the Bible does not speak of the gospel in this way. In fact the apostle Paul, writing to the church in Rome, says he cannot wait to preach the gospel to them (Romans 1:15). He continues to explain that the reason he is so excited to share the gospel was because the gospel is the power of God for salvation. Paul is arguably the greatest missionary who ever

lived and the gospel was never a stepping-stone to greater knowledge for him. For Paul, the gospel was the greatest news he possessed and he couldn't wait to share it.

The Christian gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. In addition to the letter Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he also tells the Corinthian Church about the importance of the gospel. He tells them that the gospel is the most important news and that it is all about Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:1-9).

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, we see that the cross and resurrection of Jesus are central to the gospel. The news is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and then rose again from the grave. This is good news because now the very thing that kept mankind from enjoying right relationship with God has been dealt with. Jesus, who had never sinned, chose to die for our past, present, and future sins! Jesus took the punishment for our sin. Jesus took the penalty for our sin. Jesus suffered and died a death he didn't deserve in order to give us a life we didn't deserve. The gospel says that Jesus took our sinful, messed-up life that we actually lived and exchanged it with the sinless, perfect life he actually lived. Jesus' perfectly sinless life has been fully credited to those who believe this good news as if they lived the very life that Jesus lived. This is astonishing and very good news, yet somehow it has simply become news. This is the gospel and the power of God for salvation for all those who believe. We don't need to add to it or take away from it. The gospel is good news and the gospel is the power of God. May our hearts be inclined to experience great joy as we look at the sin-forgiving death and hope-giving resurrection in the gospel of Jesus.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTION

- 1. Take time to think about your life and how it reflects the gospel. Has the gospel become simply news to you?*
- 2. Think back to when the gospel was the greatest news you ever heard and describe what made this news so great.*
- 3. As you've taken time to think specifically about the sin-forgiving and hope-giving gospel of Jesus, ask yourself if there has been anything that has stood out to you. Take time to write out thoughts.*

GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1. What is the gospel and why is it good news?*
- 2. Is it important that we experience the gospel as good news? Why or why not?*

3. Read Romans 1:16, what about the gospel do you think makes Paul unashamed to share it?

4. In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for those who believe it. What makes the gospel powerful for those who believe it?

PRAYER

Pray that the gospel would be forever increasing and the greatest news our hearts know.

DEFINING EVANGELISM

SCRIPTURE

Consider the following Scriptures: Matthew 9:37-38, Matthew 28:19-20, John 10:16, John 14:6, Romans 10:11-15

COMMENTARY

Our definition of evangelism is very important. Often we have it a bit skewed or misunderstood. When evangelism is often discussed, it tends to focus on how churches mobilize their people to get out and connect with unbelievers. But when we think in these terms, the definition of evangelism can be mistaken as a maneuver or a project, rather than proclamation.

One pastor submits the definition of evangelism saying , “evangelism simply means to herald the good news of Jesus. The evangelist, or messenger, is the one who says, ‘Jesus has come and preached good news. Jesus has given his life, died for your sins, in your place, risen from the dead to overcome all of sin and brokenness, and put death to death, and bring new life to all who put their trust in him.’”

*This is the good news that makes a Christian Christian, a follower of Christ. This is the news that we can be saying to one another all the time, which means something central that we’re bound to skip if we reduce evangelism to tactics. It’s that evangelism requires affections. We will have a hard time proclaiming someone who doesn’t impress us — but not if we’re overcome with joy and captivated by glory. This means that foundational to evangelism isn’t so much our strategy for outside contact, but our seeing and savoring Jesus Christ. Evangelism is an extension of our joy in God and love for him. As one veteran missionary writes, “Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. It must be told. Who could be silent about such a fact? At the heart of mission is thanksgiving and praise. . . . When it is true to its nature, it is so to the end. Mission is an acted-out doxology. That is its deepest secret. Its purpose is that God may be glorified.” (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 116, 127)*

And then, with this kind of heart, we learn how to step out into the world and share this joy with those who haven’t yet embraced it.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are the implications for Evangelism of the Scriptures listed in the “Scripture” section of this study?

How would you define evangelism?

What gives you the greatest joy in God and love for him that motivates you to proclaim the good news?

GROUP QUESTIONS

As a group, discuss what the scripture has revealed to you about evangelism.

John Piper wrote, “It seems this current generation is just content to sow and not reap.” Do you find this to be true? What does that mean?

Would you add to or subtract anything from the given definition of evangelism?

CALL TO EVANGELISM

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 28:18-20 [ESV]

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

ROMANS 10:14-15 [ESV]

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

COMMENTARY

Making a disciple of Jesus starts with conversion. One of the most important things we have to understand about the great commission is that it is a call and command first to evangelism. As we saw last week that evangelism is the bringing of good news to people. When Jesus commands his disciples to make more disciples the first implication is that his disciples would go and tell the world the gospel. This is evangelism and Jesus has called all his followers to tell the world that, "King Jesus has won!" Jesus has conquered our greatest enemies; Sin, Satan, and Death.

Jesus is the only way to salvation. Romans 10:9 says, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved." Sounds easy, right? But how are people to believe in Jesus if they never hear of him? And how are they to hear without someone telling them? They can't! This is why Jesus has commanded his followers to go and tell the world this great news. Jesus has commissioned his people to tell their friends, neighbors, and everyone the gospel.

It doesn't matter if you have been a Christian for 1 day or 40 years, Jesus has called you to be missionaries and evangelists in the very place we live. Your

workplace is your mission field and your co-workers need to know the gospel. If you don't tell them, who will?

The call to go and make disciples is a call and command to evangelism and in the Great Commission Jesus has called us to join his mission. We are Jesus' missionaries; we are his evangelists, we have been given the wonderful task of telling the world that Jesus saves!

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. As a Christian you are a carrier of good news. What would the world look like if Christians everywhere viewed themselves as missionaries and saw evangelism as a wonderful privilege to share the gospel with those around them?*
- 2. Who do you know that doesn't know Jesus, have you ever told them about who Jesus is and what he has done on their behalf?*
- 3. Has the Holy Spirit brought anyone to your mind this week that doesn't believe in Jesus? Spend some time praying that they would come to know him and ask the Holy Spirit for an opportunity to tell them about Jesus.*

GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1. Do you think the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is a command for some Christians or all Christians?*
- 2. What would the world look like if Christians everywhere viewed themselves as missionaries and saw evangelism as a wonderful privilege to share the gospel with those they knew?*
- 3. What do you think keeps people from sharing the gospel?*
- 4. As a group, discuss specific ways you can share the gospel with those you know?*

PRAYER

Think of a specific person you know that doesn't believe in Jesus. Pray that they would come to know him this year. Pray that you would have the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

EVANGELISM & THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

SCRIPTURE

Consider the following Scriptures: 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 Peter 3:18, John 16:18, John 3:6; Ephesians 1:13

COMMENTARY

GOD'S ROLE

Many fears that surround evangelism could be extinguished if the process were better understood. God's role in the venture of salvation is clear: God saves people. He desires that no one would live or die separated from Him; He provided a way that everyone could be united with Him; and He draws those who are lost to Himself.

1. God desires that none should perish. 1 Timothy 2:4

God's desire is that everyone should come to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Scripture clearly speaks to the fact that no one was created with the intention that he should be destined for Hell. Although God's wish is that none should perish, He chooses not to force salvation on anyone. There are different aspects of God's will; two of these are His "perfect will" (what pleases God) and His "sovereign will" (everything that happens is either permitted or willed by Him). It is God's perfect will that everyone would be a Christian and yet, in His sovereignty, God allows man to choose or reject Jesus.

2. Jesus gave His life so that no one would have to perish. 1 Peter 3:18

In His death and Resurrection, Jesus provided a way for everyone to become a child of God. First Peter 3:18 speaks to the idea of a substitutionary death. What man earned for his sinfulness was death, eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). That sin had to be accounted for; someone needed to pay if the relationship between God and man was to be restored. As a means to accomplish that restoration, Jesus became a sacrifice for man. Although He was sinless, He became sin for humanity so that His righteousness would be transferred to the believer. He took the punishment that man deserved, becoming a substitute for us. After giving His life on the Cross, Jesus conquered death and rose from the grave; because of Jesus' victory, man can experience a restored relationship with God. Anyone, no matter the depth of his sin, has the opportunity to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit convicts and draws non-believers to God. John 16:18

This should be a relief to the anxious evangelist: God does the work for you. The Holy Spirit is the active element that works on the heart of the lost, leading that person to a place where he or she is prepared to commit his or her life to Jesus. John 6:44 shares that no one can simply decide to become a believer, God draws him or her first. Without the movement of the Holy Spirit, the message of the Gospel is foolishness to man (1 Corinthians 1:18). Without the drawing of the Holy Spirit, not even the most skilled speaker could convince someone of the validity of Jesus.

4. When Jesus saves you, the Holy Spirit regenerates and seals the believer. John 3:6; Ephesians 1:13

The saving part of salvation is a work of God, not man. No one can work enough to earn himself salvation. Further, no one can work enough to earn salvation for someone else. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. —Ephesians 2:8–9 As a person is given faith to receive the free gift of salvation, he is immediately regenerated and sealed by the Holy Spirit, marked as belonging to God.

MAN'S ROLE

The comforting news in the process of evangelism is that you are not held accountable for the results of the conversation; you are held accountable for your obedience in sharing your faith.

1. Every believer has a personal account of the Gospel to share.

Every believer in history has a three-part story: his life before Christ, how he met Christ and what his life is like now with Christ. Training, strategies and study will certainly assist in becoming excellent in the art of evangelism but every believer, upon his or her moment of salvation, is equipped to share their story.

2. Christ-followers are called to share the Gospel. 2 Corinthians 5:18; Matthew 28:16–20

Christians are called to be ministers of reconciliation, recipients of grace who are charged with sharing that grace with others. Although the Great Commission was charged to a particular group of disciples, the challenge stands for the Church at large: We are to share the hope that we have found.

3. Believers are responsible for faithfully living out that call. 1 Corinthians 3:5–9

In 1 Corinthians 3:5–9, the apostle Paul addresses a problem in the church of Corinth: The congregation was giving man credit for God’s work. Paul was praised for his skill at evangelism, Apollos lauded for ushering believers toward maturity. But the apostle recognizes that he and Apollos were not the ones who brought about salvation or maturity; only God could produce any kind of spiritual fruit in a person. It was God who saved them. It was God who grew them.

Notice the wording in verse 8: “He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.” Neither Paul nor Apollos would be judged on the results of their work. Instead, the ministers would be held accountable for their diligence in the process of the work. God expected them to invest their lives in sharing the Gospel and raising up new disciples into maturity in the faith. That same expectation is in place for believers today; we are held accountable to faithfully fulfill our call, not to produce results. Bill Bright defines successful evangelism as “taking the initiative powered by the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel and leaving the results to God.” You will not be judged on the crops; you will be judged on the labor.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

If God desires that none should perish (His perfect will) why would He give man free will?

Describe the difference between God’s perfect and sovereign will. How does one know God’s perfect will? How does one know God’s sovereign will?

How does Scripture connect sacrifice and the atonement of sin?

Why was Jesus’ sacrifice necessary for the forgiveness of sin?

How did the Holy Spirit convict you of your sinfulness?

Describe a time when you shared the Gospel with someone who considered it foolishness. If you could revisit that conversation, how would you have addressed it differently?

What does it take for a person to get to heaven? Describe some false requirements that man adds

GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS

What advice would you give to someone who is sharing his faith story for the first time? What holds back believers from sharing their story?

Read Romans 10:17; according to this verse, what role does evangelism play in God's plan to see the lost come to faith?

Some converts who came to faith in closed, unreached nations have been presented with the Gospel in dreams. Why wouldn't this be the Lord's primary method of presenting the truth?

SHARING THE GOSPEL

SCRIPTURE

ROMANS 10:14-17 [ESV]

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

COMMENTARY

You may have heard it said, “go and preach the gospel and if necessary use words.” This statement is often used to point out that the Christian life ought to be mark by good deeds, implying that Christians ought be so generous in their good deeds that the gospel is obviously communicated. However cleaver the statement, you CAN NOT preach the gospel with out using words. Romans 10:17 is very clear, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing of the word of Christ.” To suppose you could preach the gospel with anything other than words is to misunderstand the gospel. As we saw in week one, the gospel is news to be shared, not good deeds to be done. Yes, the Christian is to be generous in their good works, Jesus himself said so, “let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). However, good works with out proclaiming the gospel with our words is not evangelism, it is just good works. Evangelism is telling the good news of Jesus. We must use words. We must proclaim the gospel or there will be no salvation.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1. What fears do you have about sharing the gospel?*
- 2. Why do you think it is easier to be generous in good works than share the gospel with someone?*
- 3. Would you pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with someone you know?*

GROUP QUESTIONS

- 1. Why do you think it is easier to be generous in good works than share the gospel with someone?*
- 2. What are some fears you have about sharing the gospel?*
- 3. Ask other members in the group to share ways they have shared the gospel with others. Talk about what has worked and what hasn't.*
- 4. Discuss as a group different ways you can enter a conversation about Jesus with your friends, family, or someone you know.*

PRAYER

Pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with someone you know? Ask you Community Group to pray along side you.

PRAYER AND EVANGELISM

SCRIPTURE

Consider the following Scriptures: *Philippians 3:7-11, Colossians 4:2-4, Matthew 9:38*

COMMENTARY

PRAYER AND EVANGELISM

First, prayer is important because it leads us to intimacy with Christ.

God has called us first to be lovers of Christ before we become lovers of the lost, or lovers of the church. In prayer we connect with this One who is Creator and Sustainer as well as Redeemer and Friend. We pour out our hearts in prayer, and receive from the Lord His sweetest comforts and assurances.

When the Apostle Paul, the greatest church planter of any generation, sat in a Roman prison for the sake of the gospel, he reflected on what was most important to him. God had used him to bring the good news to Asia and Europe. He had trained and mentored scores of leaders and planted churches all across the known world. But what was most precious to him was intimacy with Jesus.

Read Philippians 3:7-11

Second, prayer is important because it puts us in touch with Christ's vision and plan for His people.

A story about the Old Testament leader Joshua illustrates the point.

"Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" (Joshua 5:13 – 15).

Obviously this story is not about evangelism, but it is about warfare. And evangelism is warfare. As Joshua prepared to lead Israel in siege against the city of Jericho, he had an encounter with an angel, perhaps the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. When Joshua asked if the man was "for us or for our enemies," the reply was, in effect, "Neither. I command the army of the Lord, and you'd better worry about whose side

you're on." Joshua quickly grasped the point, and fell on his face in reverence. "What message do you have for me?" he asked.

Like Joshua, it's easy to assume that we're in charge, that evangelism is our battle. But that puts us at odds with the true Commander, the Lord of the church. When we humble ourselves and listen, as Joshua did, the Lord will lead us in His victory.

What follows in Joshua 6 is the famous battle of Jericho. God's battle plan must have seemed ridiculous at first. March around the city every day for six days. Then on the seventh day, march around seven times, and have the priests blow their trumpets. But on the seventh day, when the walls collapsed, Israel won a great victory—God's victory. Prayer is all about humbling yourself, listening, and obeying. The Lord has a vision and a plan for your church to be planted. It may be a vision and plan that is unconventional. But following His vision and plan leads to His victory.

Third, prayer is important because it opens a door for the gospel.

Read Colossians 4:2-4

Applying church growth principles will help us. Good research is essential. Learning good leadership skills is crucial. The right kind of practical, evangelism training is vital. But the message of the gospel will have impact only through prayer. Unless the gospel is proclaimed, no one will be saved. But without prayer, hearts will remain closed to the transforming power of the gospel. Prayer is as essential to the harvest as proclaiming the gospel.

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are the implications for Evangelism of the Scriptures listed in the "Scripture" section of this study?

What is the role of prayer in the work of evangelism?

How (practically) do you pray for evangelism? Give examples

If evangelism is analogous to war, what role does prayer play in the analogy?

GROUP QUESTIONS

Discuss how prayer has opened doors for evangelism

What is the hardest part about prayer for you?

Who have you prayed for to come to know Jesus? For how long? What has Jesus done in that relationship?

How is your prayer life?