

The Gospel

At New Life we talk a lot about the Gospel and keeping the Gospel central in our lives – our attitudes, our thinking, and our perspective. It's easy to jabber away using familiar words that become little more than jargon. Speakers don't understand what the words they use mean, and listeners don't understand the meaning of the words they hear. So, it's important that we have a clear understanding of what the Gospel is.

We also talk about the Gospel being an answer. An answer to what? Freedom, justice, peace, love. Brokenness, isolation, fear, oppression. Basic to the answer to all of these longings of the heart and this suffering of the human condition is an understanding of the Gospel. The Gospel is essential to life with hope and dignity. But what is the Gospel?

The Gospel is Jesus. More than anything else, the Gospel is who Jesus is and what he has done.

No person has had more influence over human history than Jesus. The calendars of the Common Era calibrate their beginning with the life of Jesus. The company of women and men, the great and the small, the suffering and the secure, who identify Jesus as their Saviour, King, the true and the living God, continues to swell with each new generation on every continent of the globe.

The Gospel is the declaration of what is true about Jesus. The Apostle Paul, one of the prominent writers in the New Testament, defines the Gospel this way:

I remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved: 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 Peter, then to the twelve, then to more than five hundred at one time (most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep), then to James, then to all the apostles, then last of all also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:1-7)

According to the great Apostle the simple content of the Gospel consists of 2 affirmations and 2 proofs

- 1: Jesus died according to the Scriptures. Proof: He was buried.
- 2: Jesus rose from the dead according to the Scriptures. Proof: He was seen of many.

What does that definition mean? Why are those 2 affirmations and proofs good news to you and me? Here is the answer. Jesus' perfect life satisfied that holy standard which God requires of every person. Jesus' death satisfied the justice of God that our sin deserves. Believing the Gospel means trusting God's promise that he is satisfied with Jesus' life and death, and that by grace through faith he credits the death and life of Jesus to us. Believing the Gospel means that God forgives us, adopts us into his family, and gives us new life for Jesus' sake.

Believing... ah, there's the rub. Believing is much more than giving a hearty head nod that certain propositions are true, even about Jesus. Believing places the very real and alive person of Jesus at the defining and motivating center of life. To believe the Gospel is to become a follower of Jesus and to begin a "life in the world oriented toward God" (Martin Luther).

Jesus' first recorded sermon in the New Testament (Luke 4:16-21) was from Isaiah on the subject of the Gospel.

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring **good news** to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion -- to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Jesus explanation of the ancient prophecy was simple: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled." He meant, "I am the Gospel. I am the Good News. Believe in me." It's not the earnestness, immensity, or intensity of a faith that matters – what matters, the only thing that matters, is the *object* of that faith. Jesus says to every person everywhere, "Believe in *me*."

It is not the strength of [the sinner's] faith, but the perfection of the sacrifice that saves; and no feebleness of faith, no dimness of eye, no trembling of hand, can change the efficacy of our burnt-offering. The vigor of our faith can add nothing to it, nor can the poverty of it take anything from it. Faith, in all its degrees, still reads the inscription, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." If at times the eye is so dim that it cannot read these words, through blinding tears or bewildering mist, faith rests itself on the certain knowledge of the fact that the inscription is still there, or at least that the blood itself (of which these words remind us) remains, in all its power and suitableness, upon the altar unchanged and uneffaced.... The quality or quantity of faith is not the main question for the sinner. That which he needs to know is that Jesus died and was buried and rose again, according to the Scriptures. This knowledge is life everlasting. (Horatius Bonar, *The Everlasting Righteousness*)

The Gospel is Good News. Actually, the Gospel is both the very best news possible and at the same time the very worst news possible. The Gospel message has 2 parts that must never be pulled apart. These 2 parts points us again and again to the inseparable truths of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The bad news is excruciatingly bad for those who understand the Gospel. We are more sinful than we can possibly imagine. We are broken beyond our own ability to heal ourselves. We are polluted beyond our ability to make ourselves clean. We are alienated from God beyond our ability to be reconciled to him. The more we learn about ourselves, the more we discover just how desperate our situation is without Christ. But, the good news is that in Christ and for his sake alone we are more loved by God than we could ever dare to hope.

The good news is incredibly good for those who believe the Gospel. God forgives us of all our sin for Jesus' sake. He adopts us into his family as his honored sons and daughters. He changes us by giving us his own life. He gives us all these things on the merit and sufficiency of Christ alone. He becomes our Father. Jesus becomes our Brother and Friend. He sets us free learning to live as he has designed and to express our love for him in loyal obedience and affectionate service. While we do not yet see the completion of all that God has promised to do for us and the world, the future is certain because Jesus is alive.

The Good News is that salvation is from God alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. Salvation is “not your own doing,” says the Apostle Paul. “It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his work of art, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

The Gospel is New Life. The Gospel creates community and it creates change because God has brought us into a new way of life.

Community. Following Jesus is not a solitary commitment – it is a joining with fellow pilgrims on the journey; it is being born into a family with many brothers and sisters; it is a great gathering of heavenly citizens who are free to live with integrity, justice, and creativity right now, today, in the world just as we face it. We are a body organically knit together, as it were, with God’s own DNA.

Change. But the Gospel also creates change in every area of our lives and in every area of our beings – our affections, our choices, our understanding. If the content of the Gospel is true, and if our experience of the Gospel is real, our lives must be transformed. We live with gratitude to God for what he has done. We live with joy delighting in the gracious gifts he has given us. We live with love because we cannot be silent about Jesus our Saviour. We live in fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ as we experience forgiveness and reconciliation. We live with hope that God will make all things new and right, that “justice [will] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). We live with compassion for the suffering of others -- we look for ways to show the mercy of Christ because we are convinced that that anguished cry of the heart can be met only by the Gospel. “Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in You,” prayed Augustine. As men and women made new by the power of the Gospel, we live with a passion for holiness, a desire to honor and delight Christ our King with a life wholly devoted to him and to making him known.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings **good news**, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isaiah 52:7)

We are constantly reminded of the gap that exists between who we know ourselves to be right now and the promise of what we will be when Jesus brings history and redemption to their ordained end, when we live in the world made new and fit for his residence. We still live lives stained by sin. We still live in a world broken by the presence and effects of sin. We still live in a great spiritual battle, even though Christ’s death and resurrection have made the outcome certain. Jesus’ triumph over death is the guarantee he offers that all who have new life in him will live in the world made right, free from all sin and sorrow. That is our Gospel hope. But, in the meantime, we are learning to live as men and women made new. We live with a strange tension described by Martin Luther: we are *simul justus et peccator*. We are simultaneously sinful and righteous. When we fail and fall (and we will fail more than we want to admit), we are to be driven back to the Gospel – it’s truth and reality. With the Apostle Peter, we turn to Christ like lost children, “To whom shall we go? You are the one who has the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). We repent of our sin and submit ever more thoroughly to the Holy Spirit’s renovating and transforming work, dismantling the old way of life and teaching us to walk in the new way of life given us by Christ Jesus. Even as we sorrow over our sin and turn once again to face our Saviour, we school ourselves in the truth and reality of the Gospel.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died -- more than that, who was raised -- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:31-39)

The Gospel changes everything. It is our only hope, and it is the only hope for the world. Christ alone is our life, and "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).