

Love Is the Gospel

The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God

I. The Centrality of the Gospel

1. The gospel - “good news” - of Christ and Him crucified is the lifeblood of the believer. It is not a message only useful for those who have never accepted Christ. It is a message to feed ourselves upon regularly.
2. God establishes a clear pattern in the Bible – covenant is built around testimony. Every time He renews covenant with His people, He first recounts to them the story of all that He has done. It's because of Who they have seen and known Him to be that He commands not only their obedience, but their affection.
3. Humanity also has a clear pattern in the Bible – we forsake covenant when we forget the testimony. Israel doesn't fall into apostasy by waking up one morning hating God and choosing another God. Instead the heart-breaking description is they “forgot” the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. They were going through the motions, but having forgotten why and so their hearts lost the power to remain devoted. They would chase after other gods while still going through the motions of God's covenant.
4. The purpose of the gospel is not only to escort us into salvation, but to escort us into fascination and exhilaration (and to keep us there). God did it not just to save us, but to ruin us, to awe us and to capture our hearts.

John 17:26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

II. The Power of the Gospel

1. The gospel is much more than our entry point into salvation. It's an eye-opening, heart-moving, paradigm-shifting, identity-shaping, life-altering encounter with the Truth.
2. The gospel is about revelation – a shift in identity and perspective that sets us in the right storyline. It's so easy to miss the forest for the trees – to get so caught up in the mechanics of Christian living that we totally miss the wonder of who God is and what He has done and is going to do. If our heart is not caught up in the story we can have our lines memorized perfectly and avoid making mistakes, but we'll be uninspired and flat, and contribute nothing to the story.
Ephesians 1:9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself
3. The gospel is about freedom – an encounter with the heart of the living God that sets us free from the power of condemnation and shame, free from control by our emotions and the lusts of the flesh, free from desires for worthless things, and free from our efforts to earn God's affections. Free to really love Him, because He first loved us and because He is glorious and worthy of love.

John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound

4. The gospel is our escort into the one and only place of power where we can overcome every trial – access with confidence to the presence of the Living God.
***Ephesians 3:8** To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.*
5. The power of the gospel empowers our hearts to say yes to what the gospel demands – wholeheartedness. The more the gospel of Christ becomes real in our hearts, the more the cloud of unknowing disappears. Uncertainty will always hinder abandonment – we hedge our bets with God, going only halfway in. God left no room for uncertainty in the gospel, that we could enter in wholeheartedly.
***1 John 4:16** And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love Him because He first loved us.*
6. When we encounter the true power of the gospel our hearts are empowered to say yes to the true invitation of the gospel. Hearing the right invitation is crucial – to say yes to just any invitation will not do. Deep down we know that. It's why the wrong invitation rings hollow in our hearts and despite saying yes we live in doubt as to whether we are really saved, and we certainly can't enter in to “access with confidence.”
7. Hearing the right invitation saves us from an empty life. It is possible to be saved, yet waste your life – and that's a tragedy. If we don't hear the invitation of God, we miss our inheritance in Him, and He misses His inheritance in us. The gospel is a great exchange: of our plans and thoughts for our life for a place, inheritance and purpose in God that is far greater.

III. Our Situation

***Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

1. The gospel does not start with salvation. Before salvation, there is sin and the fall, but even before that, there is the glory of God. This is “*the everlasting gospel... 'Fear God and give glory to Him... worship Him who made heaven and earth...'*” (**Revelation 14:6-7**).
2. We've settled for a gospel from a human perspective – from sin to salvation – when God gives us the gospel from His (much clearer) perspective. The message of the gospel is eternity, and the Eternal One.
3. The whole of the Biblical message is centered in the reality of “*In the beginning God...*” (**Genesis 1:1**). The gospel is about God, not about me.
4. God's self-revelation opens up to us the most important thing about us – eternity past and eternity future. We can only rightly understand where we are when we understand where we came from and where we're going.

5. The implication of the truth that we have fallen short of the glory of God, both individually and humanity as a whole, is that God created us for a place and a purpose that brought Him glory. *"...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... according to the good pleasure of His will... that we... should be to the praise of His glory."* (**Ephesians 1:4-12**)
6. All things were made *"by Him... and for Him"* (**Colossians 1:16**), so from the beginning we owe Him everything.
Revelation 4:11 *"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*
7. The essence of sin is not doing bad things, it is disagreeing with the glory of who He made us to be. More than offense against the Law, it is offense against God's glory. It's only when we see how great His glory and how great the glory He created us for is that we rightly understand how great our sin is.
8. While it's a noble sentiment that we owe God everything because He gave everything for us at the cross, it's inaccurate. We already owed God everything – a debt we could never pay. Jesus canceled that debt at the cross so that now we can freely give our love and it counts.

IV. Our Salvation

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

1. The message of salvation is that God has provided a means for both reconciliation and redemption in Christ.
Colossians 1:19 *For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight*
2. The fall brought death in the form of separation from God – banishment from Eden and the tree of life (**Genesis 3:24**).
3. Life is "correspondence with environment." (Henry Drummond's "Natural Law in the Spiritual World") If we are not in connection with God, then we are spiritually dead, no matter how good we may be.
4. Jesus brought life in the form of restoration to right relationship with God. *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."* (**John 17:3**)
5. Human beings were made for God and whether we slow down long enough to realize it or not, we will never be fully satisfied without Him. Eternal life is not about an eternity at a distance from God (that's misery and we're only getting more miserable), it's about restoration to God – now and forever.

- The gospel is about redemption, not just salvation – a return to man's eternal place in the heart of God. The cross made a way for man to return to what he was made for – fellowship with God and reigning together with Him.

Revelation 5:9 *And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God... 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new... 6 ...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."*

V. Our Decision

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

- Jesus not only made provision for redemption for those who *would* choose Him, He brought the grace to make us *able* to choose Him.
- Jesus **did NOT** change the choice – He brought grace and truth – truth to see God rightly so that we could trust Him and choose Him, grace by the giving of His Spirit to actually walk out the choice. We can't change who we are, in Christ we have the option now do we embrace it or rebel against it and go our own way?
- Not only do we owe a debt too great to pay that forever cuts us off from right relationship with God, but our minds are so clouded by the effects of sin that even *given the option* we would not of ourselves choose God.
- Sin has produced an inherent distrust in our hearts – how do we know that God's intentions for us are good? God offers us eternal life and every blessing, but in His jealousy He *does* set boundaries around our hearts and insist upon having all of us. The lie the serpent has told us from the beginning is that God is withholding something from us (**Genesis 2:5**).
- Jesus forever destroys that lie at the cross, and so empowers our weak hearts to count the cost and know without doubt that He is worth it.
"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." 1 John 3:16
"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32
- The cross demonstrates not only that God is love, but the measure of that love – He gave all.
"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16
- He did it not only out of His compassion to *save* us, but out of His passion to *have* us. *"Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... that He might present her to Himself..." Ephesians 5:25-27*

8. This is what makes the cross the great divide for all of humanity. Looking into the eyes of Jesus on the cross we have only two options. We can either rebel against His love or wholeheartedly return it, but we cannot ask Him to love us less. Arms wide open on the cross, Jesus is screaming, “*you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*” **Mark 12:30**

VI. Our Confession

Romans 10:9-10 ...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

1. Responding to that love is as simple as saying “yes.” One big “yes” as we confess Him and receive Him, followed by a lot of little ones as we walk with Him. Our confession brings us salvation as we choose Him, our faith brings us righteousness as we live in Him.
2. We confess He is Lord – Greek *kyrios* – “He to whom a person or things belong, about which He has the power of deciding.” We confess that Jesus, the One who died for us in love, *is* Genesis 1. He is the One who made us for Himself and He has the right to decide who we are.
3. Our confession is “I *belong* to Jesus.” There is a glorious difference between this confession and the confession that “I *need* Jesus.” We are His possession, that He pursued and searched out when we had gone astray, and He now rejoices at having found us.
4. The fundamental message of the gospel is not “I need Jesus” that's true, but it's **NOT** the gospel. The message of the gospel is “I belong to Jesus.” Jesus tells it three times in **Luke 15** just to be sure we get it straight.
5. We're familiar with the concept of a god-shaped hole in you. How familiar are we with a you-shaped hole in God? The gospel Jesus preaches is that we are God's prized possession, that He noticed when we went missing and He left everything to come after us in love.
6. The gospel doesn't end with us coming up the road returning home from our prodigal ways in humble recognition of our foolishness. We often act as though our Father said yes to our proposition, “I'll be Your servant and stay out of Your way if You just let me make it in.” Our Father won't even listen to that proposition. He runs to us with open arms, throws His arms around us, kisses us, puts a ring on our finger and a robe on our back and slaughters the fatted calf because, “My son has come home.” Heaven rejoices every time a sinner repents.
7. The gospel brings us a new identity the instant we accept Jesus. Your original identity as a child of God and a lover of God is restored. You are no longer a sinner struggling to love God. You are a lover of God, struggling with sin.
2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*
8. We believe that God raised Him from the dead. The sacrifice was accepted and the Man stands ever-pleading on our behalf such that nothing can take from us our salvation. “*Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” **Romans 8:34-35**

9. Our faith is that we are joined with Christ and He has redeemed us. Our salvation is not based on a 2000-year-old formula, but on an active relationship with a living God who gave Himself for us and joined Himself to us (***Ephesians 5:25,31-32***). It is because we are joined with Him that in His death our sin dies, and in His resurrection we are given eternal life. “...we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” ***Romans 6:8***
10. We are hidden in Christ, and whatever was His is now ours. His righteousness is our righteousness, His inheritance is our inheritance, His access is our access.
Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
11. Our hope is not a place, it's a Person. Jesus didn't die so that you could go to heaven one day. He died so that you could be *with Him*, today and forever.
John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.
John 17:24 “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am...”