

# WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

It's always good to be speaking the same language. If someone says "¿Hola como estas?" you probably understand enough Spanish to say, "Pretty good, thanks." But what if someone from Azerbaijan said "Müjdə nədir?" you might not realize they are just reading the title of this booklet.

We assume we speak the same language in church. We probably share English in common, but we might not properly understand some very important words, words that make an eternal difference. The casual use of the word "gospel" for instance assumes too much.

## HOW TO DEFINE THE GOSPEL

Let's start with a word study. The word gospel is a compound word from Old English, "god" (pronounced like "goat" only with a "d" at the end in place of the "t") meaning good, and "spel" meaning news or story. The word gospel is literally good news.

That's a good start, don't you think? What with all the bad news these days, it is nice to think there is something good to hear about.

Imagine being surrounded by a marauding band and then hearing someone shout at the top of their lungs, "The cavalry is coming! The cavalry is coming!" That's good news for sure.

Or, sitting in the waiting room at the hospital, when the doctor comes in after surgery smiling and letting you know she is going to have a complete recovery. That's good enough to make you cry.

But both of these examples are only good news because of the immediate circumstances. Marauding bands and the desperate need for surgery are both cause for alarm and potential grief. Then, when the good news hits, the reason to rejoice is obvious!

## THE BACK STORY or We are accountable

So, in order to hear the good news, we have to understand the bad news. We have to clearly understand and feel the desperate circumstance we are currently in, surrounded by the enemy, sick unto death.

We will get there. But first you have to understand some basic things about the world in which we live. A big idea that you need to get is God created the world including you and me. I think you know that or you probably wouldn't be reading this booklet.

But the more important detail, the obvious, logical step is that we are accountable. The maker is in control. When I draw a picture and I don't like it, I can throw it away and the paper doesn't have any say in the matter.

The Bible describes God like a potter and we are the clay. "Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles?'" (Isaiah 45:9). Absurd, isn't it?

This is absolutely true of our relationship with God. He is in charge. We are not. But we still think of ourselves as beautiful pieces of art. We might need a little burnishing, but on the whole, we are amazing to behold. Does that make you feel a little squeamish? It should.

I think we all intuitively know the next part, the bad news, the fact that we are in trouble.

## THE BAD NEWS or We are in trouble

Now you are ready for the bad news.

You might have a nice car, a beautiful house, some new clothes, a loving spouse, polite children, and a full tummy as you read this. You may feel like everything is alright. But think about it just for a few paragraphs.

If we are accountable to God and God has expectations for us, how are you measuring up? Consider just a few of the ten commandments, the familiar ones that say don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery.

Have you ever lied? I have. Have you ever stolen anything? Come on. What about committing adultery? Did you know Jesus ruins you on this one? He said if you look lustfully you have committed adultery in your heart and you are just as guilty. Ouch!

In so many ways we have chosen to rebel against God, and that means we are in trouble. The Bible calls this sin and we are all guilty before God for our own personal sin.

The Bible also says that the wages of sin is death. That's what we have earned. Eternal separation from our creator.

Now you might be thinking, but surely, I have done plenty of good in my time. Surely, I don't deserve hell.

Here is God's answer: We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment...(Isaiah 64:6)

Did you catch that? All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. That's all the good stuff we have done, and God labels it as filthy rags.

Not convinced yet? Here is God again:

Romans 3:10–18 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” <sup>13</sup> “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” <sup>14</sup> “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” <sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known.” <sup>18</sup> “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

This isn't the other guy. This is you and me. Try inserting your own name in there where you can and feel the sting of these words.

You are surrounded by a blood thirsty bandits and your life is in peril! You are in desperate need of surgery or you will die!

## THE GOOD NEWS or God has a way of escape

And here comes the cavalry, the brilliant surgeon.

Jesus came to earth to die so that we who should die might live. He was punished for something he never did so that we who deserve punishment might get what we have never deserved, eternal life.

The Bible always speaks of the cross as the only way for us to be saved. Jesus died in our place in the most loving substitution you could possibly imagine. And Jesus did this willingly.

Jesus said

Matthew 20:18–19 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”

Jesus knew. And he willingly gave his life for you that you would not be punished for your sin.

Does that sound like good news? If it doesn't, I don't think you understand the bad news. As it stands, apart from Christ, we all are headed to hell. That's just God agreeing with our rebellion. If we don't want anything to do with him in this life, how can we expect anything different in the next?

Imagine being surrounded by the blood thirsty enemy again. Then comes the cry, “The cavalry's coming!”

How will you respond? Will you say, it's not that bad. We don't need saving. This is a fatal denial of reality.

When all the doctors say you need surgery or you will die, what do you say? It's not that bad? I think I will be fine?

When the Bible says over and over that hell is the home of all who have sinned, and **ALL HAVE** sinned, how will you respond?

## RECEIVING THE GOOD NEWS

It is all about two simple words, repent and believe. These are the words of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles that followed. If you want to be saved, repent and believe.

**REPENTANCE** is a change of direction that stems from a change of mind. The best biblical illustration of this is the parable of the prodigal son. You can read the details in Luke 15.

After taking his inheritance early, the prodigal son wastes all of his money and becomes a beggar. Wallowing with the pigs, wishing he could eat some of their slop, he comes to his senses. He realizes he would be better as a servant in his father's household than wasting his life away until he dies. So, he stands up and humbly returns home hoping that his dad will hire him.

This is the two-fold picture of repentance. The prodigal comes to his senses (a change of mind) and then returns to his father (a change of direction). We have been the slaves of sin, gladly running from God for years. If we repent, we must decide that sin is miserable, wicked stuff and at the same time see the goodness of God's grace and head in a different direction. That is, return to our maker, as the only lover of our souls.

Jesus and all the rest also say we must **BELIEVE**. Now there is a confusing word. Jesus didn't mean we should believe that something is true. His point was that we should trust our lives to him.

The story is told of an aeronautical engineer who designed one of the first jet engines for commercial flight. After telling the reporters of the powerful thrust of the turbines and the many

safety features, he was asked by a reporter if he was going aboard the plane for the test flight. He emphatically said no!

This is the meaning of believe. You can know the virtues of something but until you rely on it, you don't fully believe.

What are we supposed to believe in to receive salvation? Jesus. Believe that he died on the cross for your sins. Believe that his sacrifice is all you need to be forgiven. Put all of your hope in Jesus and you will be saved.

This is God's promised free gift of salvation for all who repent and believe.

But don't think you only get eternal life! When you put your hope in Jesus Christ for salvation here is the short list of what you receive:

- Forgiveness of sin
- Remission of guilt
- Removal of punishment
- Deliverance from the power of sin
- Justification
- Redemption
- Sanctification
- Eventual glorification
- Access to God
- The knowledge of God
- Being known by God
- Becoming a new creation
- Being born again
- Receiving a new nature
- Being credited with the righteousness of Christ
- Adoption into God's family

Eternal fellowship with the Triune God  
The indwelling Holy Spirit  
The fruit of the Spirit  
The fellowship of the saints  
The ability to forgive others  
The ability to love others  
The ability to face difficulties with no fear  
The gift of faith  
An unshakeable faith in the Sovereignty of God  
The knowledge of love  
The joy of God's grace  
Worship  
Being the beloved bride of Christ  
A partaker in the promise to Abraham  
The joyful anticipation of the coming of Christ  
The knowledge of the truth  
The armor of God

Do we need to talk? Do you have some questions? Or do you want to know more? Let's get together and chat about all of this over coffee, my treat. [Give me a text or call at 970-620-0424.](tel:970-620-0424)

There is a little book I would like to buy you. In fact, I have a few copies sitting in my office right now. The title of the book is the same as this booklet, What is the Gospel. In 120 pages Greg Gilbert says what I have tried to get across in just a few. Gilbert tells it better with great illustrations and a humorous style. If you want to hear more, I will give you this book right now. Just ask and it is yours, **FREE**.