

What is the Gospel - Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] I hope you're really looking forward to this weekend. I certainly am. And of course, as Roy has already mentioned, we could not be tackling a more important question than the one we're going to be setting our sights on this weekend.

So we want to do our best to answer the question, what is the gospel? And my prayer is that we will come away from this weekend knowing the gospel more clearly, of course, but not just knowing the gospel more clearly.

But don't we want to come away from this weekend more in love with the God of the gospel and more delighted and thankful for what God has done for us in Christ Jesus and more motivated to obey the gospel and throw ourselves into the work of the gospel and live for the kingdom.

We want God to be at work among us this weekend. So we need to pray that by his word and his spirit, he would work in our hearts. Let's pray again.

Loving Father, we thank you again for gathering us this evening, for calling us with the gospel into fellowship with you and your son. We do pray for a fruitful and enriching weekend, that we would learn new things, remember things that we might have forgotten, be encouraged where we are feeling weak, be rebuked or warned where we've gone astray, shape us and mold us by the gospel into the likeness of our Savior and King, Jesus Christ.

[1 : 2 8] For we ask these things in his precious and powerful name. Amen. Now my guess is, oh, by the way, you'll find an outline inside your booklets if you want one.

On page three, I think, is the first talk. And my guess is that most of us here already know what the gospel is, which perhaps makes it a slightly curious topic for us to cover.

On the one hand, I'm hoping that lots of what I'm going to say over this weekend is going to be familiar. But on the other hand, I must say, I don't really like telling people just what they already know.

There's something rather tedious about that, isn't there? And so I do hope that as we go through this old material, that somehow God will clarify and deepen our knowledge of the gospel.

And I must say, as I've been preparing these talks, I have been thrilled again by the gospel and also challenged and sharpened in my understanding of it because, of course, it's always deeper and wider and more profound than we have yet comprehended.

[2 : 3 9] Right? So, we're going to start with the basics. And perhaps, hopefully, slow burn and build as we go through. I suspect that the first thing we all know about the gospel is that it's good news.

Right? And that's not a bad place to start. In fact, that would be a fantastic name for a course. But I want to work through a little definition a bit more carefully with you and slightly adjust it.

So you'll see on your outline, that first, when we say that kind of thing, when we tell people that the gospel is good news, first, I think we need to realize that what we're actually saying is not really what the gospel is, but what a gospel is.

You see, we're not telling people the content of the Christian gospel just yet, are we? No, we're just telling them the kind of message that we have for them, that we have good news for them.

And that's a category of thing, isn't it? It's a category of speech. There are lots of pieces of good news out there. So, to begin with, let's just make sure we understand this category.

[3 : 46] What defines a gospel? Number one, a gospel is news. So just have a think about news with me for a moment. Apart from the gospel, what's the biggest piece of news you've ever heard?

And it doesn't have to be good at this stage. Let's just think about news together. There's probably not enough good news out there to do a meaningful brainstorm. So, let's just think about, and I just want you to call out, let's try and come up with a list together.

What is the biggest piece of news or some of the big news headlines that have swept across our world, maybe in our lifetimes, but yeah. Sizzler closed.

Sizzler closed. That's good, Tom. That's a good start. Yannick? Global pandemic. COVID-19, the global pandemic. That was just huge news. Yeah. That's actually better, Tom.

That was more what I had in mind. Anyway, no. I'm kidding. Luke Dickinson being born. Luke Dickinson being born, right. And new birth. It might not spread that far, but it has spread among us anyway. Yeah.

[4 : 45] Exciting stuff. Man walking on the moon. Yeah. 1969. Man walking on the moon. Just checking. It was before my lifetime. 9-11. 9-11.

9-11 was absolutely huge. Do you remember where you were when 9-11 happened, if you're old enough? I remember where I was. You know, I can't remember how old I was. But I was walking through a school corridor.

I overheard it from a couple of teachers saying, you know, you'll never guess what's just happened. Right? That was massive news, wasn't it? Others. There are others. I've got a list here.

What have you got? The Queen. The death of the Queen. Yeah. The death of the Queen. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Where you were when Princess Diana.

Yeah. Yeah. Tragic. Steve Irwin dying. Steve Irwin dying. Yeah. Similar. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Space shuttle blowing up. Yeah.

[5 : 40] Was it Apollo 13? Apollo 13. What was it? Challenger. Challenger. Yeah. Yeah. And, sorry. And the teacher. Was she on it?

Yeah. That was horrendous news. Yeah. Yeah. Donald Trump is president. Yeah. Okay. That was pretty significant. I don't think we quite knew what we were in for, did we? Donald Trump is the president.

Yeah. Okay. That was a big one. That was a big one. Impeachment of Donald Trump. Impeachment of Donald Trump. Yeah. Right. A lot of American news, isn't it? A lot of American news. Osama bin Laden. Yeah.

Osama bin Laden when he was assassinated. Yeah. Berlin Wall. The fall of the Berlin Wall. Yeah. 1989. You went alive. I was 10 days old.

So it's quite vivid. It's quite vivid. Yeah. Tiananmen Square Massacre happened around the same time. I was thinking the invasion of Afghanistan or Iraq as well, I remember, was just, you know, just a massive piece of news.

[6 : 40] Now, that's a great list. Okay. Now, the question is, of course, what makes these things news? What is news? And the most obvious thing is that these things all qualify as news because they were shared.

Right? They were reported. They were announced, declared. All news involves words and communication. So if a tree falls in a forest but no one is around to report it, then that's not news.

Maybe it should be news, probably depending on the tree, but maybe it should be news or it could be news, but it won't be news until someone reports it. And this has big implications for the Christian news.

You know that old saying that St. Francis of Assisi is said to have said, but he probably didn't actually say, preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.

Here's what, I think I've got a slide, have I, Simon? Here's what Don Carson, he was probably looking like this at the time. Here's what Don Carson writes about that. He says, it sounds really cute.

[7 : 42] It's designed to get us active and obedient and not merely word people who have no outworking of the gospel in our lives. The motive in saying this alleged thing from Francis of Assisi is good, but it makes about as much sense as saying to a news anchor at the 10 o'clock news, this evening, give us the news.

If necessary, use words. What you do with news is announce it. Thus, there is a huge emphasis in scripture on preaching, teaching, heralding, and bearing witness to the gospel.

Now, I expect we're all fairly familiar with this point, so I'm not going to labor it, but I just want to give you one more quote that I like from a bloke called Ed Stetzer. He comments, I don't have this on the slides, he comments that that phrase is a little bit like saying, feed the hungry, my brethren, and if necessary, use food.

It's just absurd, isn't it? It's lunacy, to quote another friend of mine. So, let's be really clear, a gospel is a piece of news that requires words to communicate it.

Before we move on to point number two, though, I think it's worth asking another question, which is something like, so what makes an event newsworthy? What makes an event newsworthy or not?

[9 : 00] And there are lots of things to say here, so you won't spend all night on it, but perhaps the first thing is that news has to be about something remarkable, unusual, noteworthy.

No one's interested in hearing everyday, ordinary things reported in the news, like our top headline today is that most people have woken up and are getting dressed. That's just not newsworthy, because it's not unusual enough.

It's too everyday. The other thing about news, as the name suggests, is that it's supposed to be about new things. That's where the word news comes from.

News is supposed to be about new events, new discoveries, new information that has come to light. No one's interested in old news. That's an oxymoron. That's why it's so hard to speak on things that people already know, by the way.

But news has to be contemporary. We're interested in current affairs, aren't we? We're interested in breaking news. That's what separates news from history, or merely from kind of teaching and explaining things.

[10 : 07] So if I were to tell you that the stock market crashed in 1929, well, that's not news, is it? That's just history. But if I were to tell you that the stock market crashed five minutes ago, well, then that's big news.

I don't know if it has or not. Hopefully not. But of course, new is a kind of slightly slippery term. It's relative. So what's new to you might not be new for me.

Or again, some pieces of news, I think, get older faster than others, because some things chop and change at a faster pace than others, and are sort of superseded by the latest news, the newer news.

Part of the reason that the stock market crash of 1929, for instance, is no longer news, is, of course, because there have been so many dips and troughs and highs and lows in the stock market since then, that it no longer seems relevant.

And that leads us to another thing that's important about newsworthiness. Newsworthiness, perhaps the most important test of whether or not something is newsworthy, is this idea of relevance.

[11 : 14] Will this piece of news have any bearing on my life? Will this piece of news affect me? That's why proximity is often fairly important to news, and probably the Dickinson baby and maybe Steve Irwin kind of reflect that a little bit, don't they?

That's news especially for us in our area. We want the news in our area because it's going to affect us. And we especially want to know things if they're going to require a response from us.

I think that's how newspapers started, by the way. I think modern newspapers, this is just off the cuff, but I think they started in Venice with merchants wanting news about foreign wars or something where they needed to get news that was going to affect their trading.

So they started getting little newspapers, circulating little newspapers around. So is this new information, is this new thing I've discovered or been told, now that I know it, is it going to change the way I live?

Am I going to make different choices as a result of hearing this news? Would I be living foolishly without this news if I remained oblivious to this news? Like the Japanese soldiers, you remember, who remained in the jungles long after the end of the Second World War because they didn't know, and even when leaflets were dropped on them, they didn't believe the news that the war was over.

[12 : 46] Now, it's not that news in itself tells you to change directly. I think actually this is really important. News is not in the imperative mood.

It's not about issuing commands like do's and don'ts. You shall go do this, you know, go buy a raincoat or build a bunker or whatever. Now news is in the indicative mood.

It tells you about facts and how things are. But very often, if something is really newsworthy, then it's going to provoke a response in you.

It's going to drive you to change. So, you know, Hurricane Watsonane is about to hit Brisbane. At one level, it's just a statement of fact. It's just an illustration, again, right?

I'm not going to be revealing too much new news to you, actually. Anyway, okay. Hurricane Watsonane is about to hit Brisbane. At one level, it's just a statement of fact. It's not a command or an instruction or a plea or an argument or something like that.

[13 : 49] But it will motivate change, right? Maybe you will go out and buy a raincoat or you might hunker down and sandbag or bring in the washing or whatever. If you believe the news, and whoever it is that's told you the news, they also might bring exhortations and encouragements and suggestions and instructions and so on along with the news to lead you in the right response.

But I think we do just need to be clear that those kind of addendums and additions, strictly speaking, are not actually the news. They are suggestions, encouragements about what to do with the news.

And of course, when it comes to the Christian gospel, this will be important for understanding commands like repent and believe or be baptized or call upon the name of the Lord or something like that.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. So first of all, a gospel is news. Secondly, a gospel is good news. In particular, that is what is meant by the word gospel in the New Testament.

Okay, so we just need to get a little bit technical here. The Greek word that we're really interested in, in the New Testament, is the word euangelion. Euangelion. From which we get words like evangelical or evangelism or evangelists.

[15 : 12] So in the New Testament, there are 68 references to the euangelion, the evangel, the gospel. There are 52 references to evangelizing or gospeling, sharing good news.

And then there are three references to evangelists or gospelers. So obviously, there are other important pieces of vocabulary besides these three.

Like you'll hear Peter talk about preaching the word or Paul talk about speaking the truth or a bunch of other kind of vocab. But just to limit ourselves to the gospel vocab, this euangelion vocab, there are 123 references in the New Testament to the gospel or gospeling or gospelers.

And they all refer to good news. Right? Not just news, but good news. Now, in most cases, of course, they're talking about the gospel. That is the Christian gospel.

But again, in a few instances, they're just talking about good news in general. Like in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 6, for instance. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 6. Paul says, But now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love, and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you, dot, dot, dot.

[16 : 35] Right? So that's the evangelism word there. Timothy evangelized them. He evangelized Paul and his companions. Because he wasn't telling them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was just telling them the good news about the faith and love of the Thessalonians, that they were doing well and they longed to see them and so on. Now, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for a gospel is besorah.

We won't go through all the details of that tonight. Only to say that the thing that makes besorah a little bit different from euangelion is that sometimes besorah can refer to bad news.

Okay? So in Hebrew, the word besorah will sometimes refer to bad news, sometimes good news. Whereas in the Greek, the word euangelion only ever refers to good news. Okay?

All right. But thirdly, finally under this heading, what is a gospel? The third thing to say is that a gospel is a piece of momentous good news.

[17 : 35] Let me just read to you from David Seckham's book, The Gospel of the Kingdom, which I think will be really helpful for us. And I should just give a small disclaimer that I'm going to quote liberally from Dr. Seckham this weekend, just because his book's so awesome.

So please bear with me in that. Anyway, he says, Gospel language is common in ancient Greek writings. And the thing to note is that it is never used of trivia.

One would not use such terms across the back fence. It is more formal. It is the language of significant announcements, often public and official. The closest it gets to common life is occasionally in announcements of marriage.

Right? The couple are really important or self-inflated. Anyway, the exception, the exception which proves the rule, is found in Aristophanes' Nights, a comedy in which disgruntled slaves persuade a sausage seller that an oracle has marked him as the future ruler of Athens.

When they send him into the assembly, he captures the members' attention by jumping forward and crying, counselors, I've got good news and want to be the first to gospel you. A gospel would always have everyone's full attention.

[18 : 50] Never since the war broke out have I seen anchovies cheaper. There is a stampede for the exit. With bitter satire, the playwright is suggesting that the Athenian rulers are more interested in their bellies than important matters of state.

Right? Right? So there you have it. Now, those are the three things, I think the three most important essential things that define a gospel. A gospel is news. A gospel is good news.

And a gospel is momentous good news. Right? So first and foremost, when we're talking about this category, when we're talking about the Christian gospel, we need to understand that it belongs to this category of thing.

It's a piece of momentous good news. I think one of my favorite little verses in the Bible that kind of sums this up is that one in Luke chapter 2. You all know it. Remember when the angel of the Lord speaks to the shepherds and he says, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

That is what a gospel is. It's the kind of news that is so good that it brings not just a little bit of joy, but great joy. And not just great joy for a few people, but for all the people, in this case, all of God's people.

[20 : 19] Everyone is going to be thrilled by this news. It is the kind of news that deserves to be shouted from the rooftops, heralded far and wide. It's spectacular, significant, life-changing, earth-shattering, wonderful good news.

All right. But of course, this brings us to point number two. What is the gospel? What actually is the momentous good news at the heart of the Christian faith? Well, to put it in another way, what is God's gospel?

So, that's where our reading from Galatians chapter one comes in. We're not going to work our way through Galatians chapter one this evening. But in verse 11, you notice Paul says, For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Sorry, I did not receive it. I did. That's awkward, isn't it? Keep you on your toes. For I, fake news, for I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, Paul is talking about that day when he was on the road to Damascus and he was confronted by the risen Lord Jesus. That's the day he heard the news. The day the gospel was revealed to him directly from heaven.

[21 : 42] And so the important thing to understand is that first and foremost, the gospel is God's message for his world. He's the one who wants to reveal it, who wants to share his gospel.

He's the first herald, if you like. Whenever we evangelize, we need to remember that we are participating first and foremost in God's evangelism. Actually, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We are spreading his news, God's news. That's why Paul saw himself as an ambassador on God's behalf. Going back to chapter 1, verse 1, Galatians chapter 1, verse 1, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.

Paul always saw himself as an ambassador on God's behalf. And you know the job of an ambassador, not sent out to speak their own message, speak on their own behalf.

An ambassador's only job is to deliver the message of his superiors faithfully and accurately, in a timely way. Right. Okay.

[22 : 54] So what is God's gospel? Notice again in verse 12 that Paul doesn't quite say that Jesus explained the gospel to him on that day.

Now, there may be some truth to that. But no, what he's saying is that God, i.e. the Father, revealed the gospel to him by revealing Jesus Christ to him.

You see the subtle difference. Jesus is not the one doing the revealing. Jesus is the revelation. And this is confirmed just a few verses later if we keep reading.

Paul says, verse 13, if you've heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born and who called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, dot, dot, dot.

[24 : 08] But do you see, what God revealed to Paul was his son. In order that Paul might preach his son to the Gentiles.

Might, in fact, gospel his son is what the word is. Might gospel his son among the Gentiles or to all the world.

To put it another way then, Paul didn't actually hear the news on the Damascus Road so much as he saw the news. He became an eyewitness of the newsworthy event that he was then commissioned to pass on.

And there are two aspects to what he saw. First, of course, there's just the fact that he saw Jesus. He saw a person. He didn't see a tree falling in the forest. He didn't see a stock market crash.

He didn't see a virus. He saw a person, Jesus. But secondly, you see, he saw Jesus exalted. He saw Jesus in glory.

[25 : 20] He didn't just see Jesus' hairstyle or, I don't know, the color of his eyes. He didn't see a baby in a manger. He didn't see a carpenter in Nazareth. Or even a man on a cross.

No, he saw Jesus resurrected and exalted at the right hand of God sitting in the place of kingly authority. Now that is the gospel.

If you want to know how to put the gospel succinctly, most succinctly, I reckon I can get it down to two words, which is quite something for me actually. The gospel is Jesus reigns.

Jesus reigns. That is basically the momentous good news at the heart of the Christian faith. Jesus reigns. Now the words are not magic, so you can translate them.

Obviously I'm using English here, you know, for you. You can put it a little differently, if you like. Jesus is Lord or Jesus is the king. But basically, the breaking news at the heart of the Christian message is that Jesus reigns.

[26 : 33] Now, notice five things about this summary though. Five things about this summary because what it has in succinctness, it lacks in explanation or explanatory power.

Number one, if people don't know who Jesus is, and we're going to need to explain who he is, right? He's not Jesus, you know, a bloke from South America, or even Jesus, that bloke in the Bible who gets called justice because having two Jesuses is just too confusing.

We need to show people the Jesus that we're talking about. The gospel is a statement about a particular man who happens to be both divine, human, an Israelite, a son of David, son of Mary, etc.

And he died, he rose again, he worked miracles, that's the Jesus we're talking about. If we're going to tell people that Jesus reigns, we're going to need to make sure that they know who we're referring to.

Number two, the gospel is a statement about Jesus' authority, and this is really important. You cannot extricate authority from the gospel.

[27 : 41] You can't rip authority out of the gospel. We'll talk more about these things tomorrow, but before we get into things like salvation, forgiveness, hope, joy, peace, love, whatever it is, the gospel is first and foremost a message about authority.

And it's going to require a response of submission to that authority. That's why Paul will talk about obeying the gospel in 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, not just believing the gospel.

The gospel is the kind of news that you have to obey. It requires submission. Number three, it's about timing. Now, this is a bit tricky, but often it's very important to get the timing right when you're telling the news, isn't it?

In fact, I think the fall of the Berlin Wall was accidentally announced early. Anyway, that doesn't matter. The timing in this gospel is very important. This story is still developing.

The latest news is not that Jesus did reign or that He will reign, although that's part of it, but it's that He does reign.

[29 : 01] That's the latest news that we have. Jesus is Lord. Jesus reigns now. Now, the kingdom has not been consummated yet.

I hope we all know that. But it has already begun. Moreover, there was a time when Jesus didn't reign. Now, this is maybe where things get a little bit tricky because, of course, Jesus has always been God and God is always sovereign.

But in Acts chapter 2, do you remember when Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost, do you remember his punchline? One of the most important verses in the Bible. A good punchline to remember.

What does he say? After talking about Jesus' resurrection, he says, Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

In other words, there was a time when, in this sense, Jesus was not Lord and Christ. He was not reigning. But now, that time is over and now, Jesus reigns.

[30 : 19] God has made Him both Lord and Christ. Now, it's not that Jesus has become God or become divine or any nonsense like that. That's a contradiction in terms.

But, it's that He has been exalted as God's King. That is the gospel. That is the momentous good news. That Jesus has begun to reign and is still reigning presently.

Now, fourthly, just notice the nature of this statement that it is a proposition. Okay, it's a truth claim. It's a statement of fact. And in particular, I think it's worth mentioning that it's not actually a story.

It's not a story. So, although it's embedded within a story, and the story is very important, it's not, first and foremost, the story of how Jesus came to reign.

No, it's the assertion that He does reign. It seems to me that this gets confused all the time. So, I hope this isn't too controversial and I don't want to fight with you about it.

[31 : 28] You know, I love you. I hope you love me. But, if you love this song, one song that you might notice we're not going to sing this weekend is that one by City Alight.

There is one gospel on which I stand. You know this one? For all eternity. Now, it's a lovely song in lots of ways. You know? And I don't want to be too nitpicky.

So, again, please forgive me if you like it. Just keep singing along. It doesn't matter. But I'm not sure we should sing it because the one thing I don't think it gets quite right is a good definition of the gospel.

Which, to me, is just a bit of a deal breaker. It's not bad. It's not a bad song. Everything it's saying is wonderful except for this one little thing. Big thing. Do you remember how it goes?

There is one gospel on which I stand for all eternity. It is my story. My father's plan. The son has rescued me. And at the end you come back to that and say, oh, it's the old story.

[32 : 35] Now, very often, if not always, news headlines have stories that go with them, don't they? And the gospel is part of a very important story. story. But when we're trying to define what the gospel is, which I think that song is sort of purporting to do, actually the gospel is not a story.

It's an announcement that Jesus reigns. It's just a fact. It's not a story. And fifthly, and finally, if we're going to tell people that Jesus reigns, and we tell them what Jesus we're talking about and how he reigns now and so on, the other big question, of course, is over what?

Jesus reigns, frankly, is sort of a half-finished kind of a sentence, isn't it? Jesus reigns over what? Over, you know, Australia, over the Commonwealth Bank, over the world?

Well, not exactly. Jesus reigns over the kingdom of God. And so, the gospel vocabulary in the New Testament can be applied equally well to either proclaiming Jesus as king or Jesus as lord or proclaiming his kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Because the two are so obviously inextricably linked. They're almost equivalent terms. When Jesus is established as God's king, at that moment, God's kingdom is established.

[34 : 02] You can't have a king without a kingdom. You can't have a kingdom without a king. It just doesn't make sense. Any more than you can have a leader without followers or a shepherd without sheep. That's why, of course, going back to Acts chapter 2, Jesus, after his resurrection, was made both lord and Christ because before that, he was sort of lord and Christ elect or something like that.

The chosen and anointed lord but not the installed lord. Up until then, the kingdom of God, in a sense, didn't exist or hadn't arrived. Jesus said in the gospels that it was near, that it was coming, it was about to arrive but it hadn't yet got there and then as soon as he was installed, the kingdom appeared, as it were.

Now, time to wrap up. What have we covered this evening? Basically, two things. Number one, what is a gospel? A gospel is momentous good news. And number two, what is the gospel?

The gospel is the news that Jesus reigns. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and so on, he's been appointed to a position of great authority. He is reigning now.

This is quite simply a fact, a proposition, even though the story is important. And of course, what Jesus is reigning over is God's kingdom. Let's pray.

[35 : 34] Loving Father, thank you for installing Jesus on the throne of heaven. We know that he deserves it and that he is a great and glorious king, righteous, loving, full of wisdom.

We pray that in our hearts, in our families, in our churches and in our communities, that Jesus would be honored and adored and receive the recognition he deserves.

Amen.