

Sermon: What is the Gospel Message?

Readings: [Isaiah 53:1-6](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#); [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) (against the backdrop of Psalms 22, 23 and 24).

Songs: Joy has dawned at [Joy Has Dawned \(Official LyricVideo\) - Keith & Kristyn Getty - YouTube](#) and Salvation's Song at [Salvation's Song -Lyrics - YouTube](#)

Call to Worship: Acts 26:22-23 and Revelation 21:3

What is the Gospel Message? Do you know, and live the Gospel Message? This is the very basis of our faith.

It is the foundation upon which our faith is built. It is the road upon which we travel on our journey of faith, and it is the bridge that allows us to cross the divide between us and God. To break the sentence of eternal separation from God.

All of the Bible points to the gospel message. And yet, growing up, I don't recall hearing a sermon that addressed this topic directly or as bluntly as asking the question "What is the gospel message?".

At Christmas we celebrated the birth of Jesus. At Easter, his crucifixion and resurrection. Ascension Day was a public holiday. We had services at the time of Pentecost. We celebrated Trinity Sunday.

There was teaching on particular books of the Bible, or on selected passages from the Bible. Moses crossing the Red Sea. David's battle with Goliath. The fall of Jericho. Prophecies of Isaiah. The many beautiful Psalms, and the miracles performed by Jesus. Jesus calming the storm. Jesus feeding the 5000. Jesus on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples. And many others.

It was at that time, more than 20 years ago, when I was first called on to deliver a sermon that I began to consider what my answer would be if someone said to me:

"So, you are a Christian believer. Tell me what is the gospel message?"

And I realised that it wouldn't help to say that the questioner should read the Bible. To point him or her in isolation to Daniel in the lion's den or John the Baptist, preaching at the Jordan River.

And so, I grappled with this.

Can you relate to this?

Maybe your experience was different.

But I imagine that for many of you, your experience would have been the same as mine when confronted unexpectedly with the question "What is the gospel message?"

This morning I want to look at this question and consider these four points that help me understand and explain the gospel message:

1. God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge;
2. We live in a fallen world where sin separates us from God;
3. God sent Jesus to die for us to break our separation from Him; and
4. By responding and repenting we are saved.

The **first** point which we touch on only briefly this morning is that God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge. We as men and women were created in God's image to serve, worship and reflect Him.¹ The chief end of men and women is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.² To glorify God and to enjoy him forever, required men and women to act in obedience to God. Living in obedience to God meant that men and women were with God, and were not separated from him in any way.

The **second** point is we live in a fallen world where sin separates us from God. This resulted from mankind rebelling against God by sinning against His holy character and law.³

Our participation in the sin comes, both from Adam as representative of mankind, and from our own actions.⁴

Because of this we are exposed to the righteous wrath of God and to judgement, resulting in our eternal separation from God.⁵

¹ See: [Genesis 2:7, 16-17; 18:25; Matthew 25:31-33](#)

² The Westminster Shorter Catechism. See: [Westminster Shorter Catechism - Wikipedia](#)

³ [Genesis 3:1-7](#). And from: From: [What is the Gospel? - Christ Community Church](#). An article on What is the Gospel? A gospel summary adapted from The Deliberate Church by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander. ⁴[1 Kings 8:46; Romans 3:23; 5:12, 19; Ephesians 2:1-3](#)

⁵ [Ephesians 2:12; John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Matthew 13:50](#)

We are all sinners. In the words of Isaiah "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.*"

Just as a person who does not believe they are drowning does not need a lifeguard, a person who does not believe he or she is a sinner will see no need for a Saviour. Therefore, there must be an explanation of the 'Bad News' before explaining the Good News.

Paul writing to those in Rome wrote that there is no one righteous, no not one,⁶ and also that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.⁷

Every one of us has transgressed the laws of God in our thoughts, words and deeds more times than we could ever imagine.

Our sin separates us from God. And this is a separation that we cannot bridge in our own strength or through our own efforts.

The Old Testament is full of examples of the failure of the people of God to keep his commandments through their own strength, and by their own efforts. Time and time again they fail.

It is as if we are standing at one edge of a deep ravine with God out of reach on the other side.

It was because of this, and because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to save us.⁸

This brings us to the **third** point in the gospel message, namely that God sent Jesus to die for us to break our separation from God.

I want to consider this point against the backdrop of two passages. The first from Isaiah 53 and the second from Corinthians.

The book of Isaiah was written some 700 years before the birth of Christ. I want to start with the prophecy in Isaiah 53.

⁶ [Romans 3:10](#)

⁷ [Romans 3:23](#)

⁸ John 3:16

As I read these verses consider how these words the "Shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse,"⁹ describe how Jesus, would come to earth to live among us, to be rejected, to be "pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities."¹⁰ All of this so that we, like sheep having gone astray¹¹, would be healed, forgiven¹² through Jesus taking on the punishment deserved by us.

*"53 Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"*

*2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.*

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing
in his appearance that we should desire him.*

*3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a
man of suffering, and familiar with pain.*

*Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

*4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*

*5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he
was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

*6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each
of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the
iniquity of us all."*

Isaiah foretelling in great detail the coming of Jesus. Jesus from the line of David. Jesus not being accepted for who he was, God the Son come to earth as man. Jesus being

⁹ Isaiah 11:1

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:5

¹¹ Isaiah 53:6

¹² Isaiah 53:5

despised and pierced for our transgressions, so that we, who had gone astray each turning to our own way, could be healed and forgiven.

God the Father laying on Jesus the iniquity of us all. Offering a sacrifice, just as the priests would have laid their hands on the scapegoat and symbolically put Israel's sins on it.¹³

Foretelling that Jesus would be crucified as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. This foretelling is also found in detail in Psalm 22, a Psalm of David.

We move then to two passages in the letters by Paul writing to the Corinthians. I start with 1 Corinthians¹⁴ where we read:

"3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,"

Paul makes this statement after having reminded his brothers and sisters of the gospel that he preached to them. The gospel that they received and on which they had taken their stand. In other words, they had become believers, and followers of Christ, in accordance with the gospel preached by Paul. Paul goes on to say that it was by this gospel that they were saved.

And then he reminds his readers, as he reminds us, that in accordance with the Scriptures Christ died for our sins. In the words of Isaiah Christ was:

"pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities". Then

he was buried, but on the third day he rose again. The next

passage is this line from Paul in 2 Corinthians 5¹⁵:

"21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

¹³ [Leviticus 16:21 and see 1 Peter 2:24](#)

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:21

The footnote in my Bible¹⁶ describes this verse as a summary of the gospel and its logic and I want us to look at this very short verse in getting an answer to the question "What is the gospel message?".¹⁷

We need to consider this verse against the background of the Old Testament and our first two points:

1. God is our creator God and righteous Judge.
2. We live in a fallen world, and we are all sinners before God, under a sentence of eternal death and separation from God and all that is good.

God sent Jesus, God the Son as man, to die for us to break the separation from God.

God not only sent Jesus to live with us, but in his death on the cross God "*made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us*".

An author wrote:

"He (God) treated Jesus as if he had committed every sin ever committed by every person who would ever believe even though he, Jesus, had in fact committed none of them."

Jesus was crucified. He hung on the cross holy and sinless, the spotless Lamb, God treating Jesus as if he had lived my life, as if he had lived your life.

And then God, who punished Jesus for my sin, and your sin, turns around and treats me, and treats you, as if we had lived his life.¹⁸

Our sin placed on the shoulders of Jesus and the righteousness of Jesus credited to us.

And all of this by the grace of God, and not because of anything that you and I have done. In fact, despite everything that we have done.

Paul wrote this to those in Ephesus¹⁹

¹⁶ NIV Study Bible page 1770

¹⁷ In doing this I make use of a teaching by John MacArthur-What is the gospel in two minutes - [What is the GOSPEL MESSAGE? In 2 minutes - John MacArthur - YouTube](#) - as well as on this article: [What is the Gospel? A Look at 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 | The Exchange | A Blog by Ed Stetzer \(christianitytoday.com\)](#).

¹⁸ MacArthur referred to above.

¹⁹ Ephesians 2:4-5

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved . . ."

What does this mean? This means that by grace the cross of Jesus provides the bridge across the ravine, so that our eternal separation from God is broken.

Have you ever paused to really consider this? If you have, consider again what this means.

If you have not, consider this with me now as we look at the **fourth** point in the Gospel Message - by responding and repenting you are saved.

It means that as you respond to this good news the slate is wiped clean, your sins are forgiven. You have complete forgiveness and you are covered by the righteousness of Jesus.

Focus on what this means. It means that when God looks at the cross, he sees you and me. And when God sees you and me he sees Jesus.²⁰

What are we called to do in order to be saved? We are called on to respond to the good news of the gospel message. We are to repent of our sins by turning away from them and turning to God.²¹

How are we saved? Paul wrote this to the Romans²²:

"That 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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.... Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

An author put it like this:

"Through repentance from our sin and faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, we are welcomed into the family of God as those declared righteous in the sight of God. As we grow in grace and truth, God transforms us into the

²⁰ MacArthur referred to above.

²¹ [Matthew 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:7-9; John 20:31.](#)

²² Romans 10:9-10, 13.

image of Christ and we begin to bear the fruit of righteousness, and await future glorification.”²³

As we respond to the gospel message by repenting and accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we are forgiven, the separation from God is broken.

What does this mean for you and for me? I believe it means that you and I need to meditate and pray about these four points. Pray for a deeper understanding of them, but pray, particularly that you will be given the insights and the ability to live each day of your life in a way that reflects the teachings of Jesus and brings glory to God.

Do this with thanksgiving and by living fully for what has been done for you. St. Irenaeus of Lyons knew this and put it like this: “the glory of God is man and woman fully alive.”²⁴

Create in your mind is a vision of what we as believers can do in our congregation and in our community when we live fully, not looking back to past transgressions, but as sons and daughters fully forgiven with the assurance of eternal life with God.

Peter wrote this:²⁵

“15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,”

Be ready for the question “What is the Gospel Message” and use these points to guide your answer:

1. God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge;
2. We live in a fallen world where sin separates us from God;
3. God sent Jesus to die for us to break our separation from Him; and
4. By responding and repenting we are saved.

Amen

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²³ From: [What is the Gospel? - Christ Community Church](#). An article on What is the Gospel? A gospel summary adapted from The Deliberate Church by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander.

²⁴ See: [Irenaeus - Wikiquote](#)

²⁵ 1 Peter 3:15