

# The Essence of the Gospel

How would you define the Gospel? Would you say that the Gospel is Good News? You would be correct if you did, however, that does not give us a full enough answer. Good News it may be, but why is it Good News? Answering this question leads us to consider what is so good about the Gospel that it could have such a title. When we think about it, the Bible does not give a clear definition by saying “here is the word Gospel and this is what it means”. There are, however, some sketches and ideas scattered throughout the Scriptures where learning the essence of the Gospel comes to light. The object of this article is to examine those sketches and come to a conclusion.

## **Sin and the Gospel**

Mankind is a race of sinners. That is true (Rom. 3:10-12), but it is not exactly good news, is it? Sin is anything that works in rebellion against God. Basically, anything that is unapproved by God is sin. We are all daily guilty of sinning and breaking God’s law, which means we have broken the whole law (Jas. 2:10).

When somebody breaks the law and is caught in their transgression, then there is usually a price to pay. We have a God who sees everything (Prov. 15:3), therefore, He is intimately familiar with every single sin in our hearts, thoughts, actions, and speech. There is no escape from His overwhelming knowledge of our sin.

The matter does not end here. Romans 6:23 tells us that: “The wages of sin is death.” So you are a sinner, God knows your sins, and you are due to pay the price for that sin. We are appointed to die one day where we will face judgement for our sin (Heb. 9:27). This leads to a sentence of death proclaimed on the souls of sinful people. Matthew 13:42 shows us that this sentence means being thrown to Hell, a place of darkness and inextinguishable flames for eternity.

This is the sincere reality of all human beings, however, that is such a dreadful thing to consider. How can we claim to have any good news whatsoever if we know that this is our deserved fate? Something has to happen which changes our status before God. We cannot do that our own way because our righteousness is like filthy rags (Is. 64:6). Neither, do we have any love for God to want to be anything like Him (Rom. 3:10-18). What can be done for us?

## **The Glory of Jesus Christ**

This is where we reach a turning point. The Good News comes about when we think about Jesus Christ. John 1:1-18 shows us how God Himself came down from Heaven. He came with a human nature and lived a perfect human life. He lived in perfect harmony with His own law. When He died He was the only person who could ever have claimed to have been perfect.

His having lived a perfect life meant that He was clean and His own righteousness was perfect. Unlike our filthy righteousness, Jesus had a perfect righteousness; and He is willing to share it with anybody who will come to Him asking for forgiveness. We learn that: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21). But how did this happen?

Jesus came to our planet specifically for this purpose. He came to die and take our sin on Himself so we could be given His righteousness. Having lived a perfect life, He alone was entitled to be called righteous. However, in His death He paid the punishment that sinners deserved in Hell. This is why Romans 6:23 ends by telling us that: "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus Christ was the only person who made this possible, because only a perfect man could take our place in the suffering of Hell-fire (Is. 53:4; Jn. 10:11; Gal. 3:13; Tit. 2:14).

Here we see what is truly Good News, but surely it is only good news for those who come? If we believe this, then we do not have the whole picture. Those of us who are one with Christ are what we might call positive recipients of the Gospel. But what about those who do not come?

## **Salvation and Damnation**

At this point we have to take a deep breath and know that there are many people who are not clothed in righteousness. Those people die and face judgement without the righteousness of Christ. The result is that, instead of being judged according to the merits of Christ, they are judged according to their sins. They will be sent to eternal damnation as a result of this judgement and there is no way out.

So, it seems that we have an idea that the Gospel is Good News, but only when somebody benefits from it. However, I must disagree with this idea. Good News is good news, even if the recipient rejects the message. If you are told that

you have received a huge fortune by inheritance, then that is good news. Yet you can still reject this good news and waive your inheritance. You received the opportunity for good, but rejected it and chose something lesser. The same is with the Gospel. It is good news, regardless if somebody accepts it or not.

Adding to this, an even harder truth must be realized. Since God is eternally glorious, He must act in accordance with His glory. When He works in creation, for good or judgement, it speaks of His glory. When He works in your life, for pain or prosperity, then this equally speaks of the manifestation of His glory in your life.

The reality is that those who do not come to Jesus Christ in this life are actually God's enemies (Rom. 5:10; Phil. 3:18). When God throws sinners to Hell, He is dealing with His enemies forever. We gasp at such a thing, but in God's perfect justice and holiness this must be the case. He must protect His glory and the sanctity of His heavenly people for all eternity by keeping evil under lock and chain.

In this reality, we see that the Gospel is so much more than the possibility or intent of salvation, but is actually the glory of God. God is glorified in showing mercy to His chosen people, but He is also glorified in sending His enemies to eternal perdition.<sup>1</sup> That is a huge part of the Gospel truth, some will hear and repent of this Good News and others will reject it. Either way, the Gospel means that God is glorified and that is good news. Good News is dependent, therefore on salvation, but not necessarily a positive response to the possibility of salvation.

### **Eternal Situation**

Finally, the Gospel leads us to consider eternity. When we see summaries of the Gospel we often read things as follows: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." (1 Tim. 3:16). While not a full summary of the Gospel, this basic summary finishes with Christ's being taken up into glory. That is, His ascension. Now He sits at the throne of the Father and intercedes for our sins. When we pray and when we ask for forgiveness the Son is there with His glorious resurrection body to prove that the sinner is covered by His sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> Note John 17:4 where Jesus says that He has done all to glorify His Father. This included preaching the Gospel of salvation to those who rejected His Word, yet God is glorified, even in this. Revelation 14:7 also shows that God must be glorified for His coming judgement, some of which will result in sinners going to Hell.

Furthermore, when the sinner is given those robes of righteousness, He is guaranteed a place in Heaven at the end of his life. Nothing can rip Him out of Christ's hand, because Christ has paid such a precious price for His salvation. (Jn. 6:39). That individual will be with Christ for all eternity, praising, loving, enjoying, and worshiping Him for all eternity.

The aspect of eternity is often dropped out of our understanding of the Gospel. It seems that once we get past the salvation part that we simply say "great, we will wait for that day but until then..." Except, that is not what we are given in Scripture. Everything in history centers around the cross, yes. But the cross is the epicenter of an explosion that reaches throughout history to the day of Christ's return where all will be settled for eternity. The explosion will reach back throughout all of history and all will be accounted for as either settled by Christ's blood or lost for eternity.

Christ, therefore, is glorified in the Gospel. That is, He came to earth as the God-man, did what nobody else could dream of doing, and achieved it perfectly. That message was taken to the whole world and His glory was manifested to all who heard the truth, whether they accepted it or not. Now, in Heaven, Christ sits at the Father's throne, His work complete in all its resplendent glory. The day of judgement awaits where His glory will skyrocket into its fullest manifestation where sheep are separated from the goats.

This Gospel of Good News is all about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ Himself is the essence of the Gospel and we worship Him for all that He is and all that He will show us about Himself in eternity.