

Priority: Gospel

March 1, 2020

Daily Devotions

Day One

This week we are going to be taking a look at our priority of “Gospel.” And before we dive in too far, if someone approached you and asked, “What is the gospel?” what would you say? No, seriously... How would you respond to that question?

Take a few moments and, in the space below, write out what your response would be if you had to answer the question, “What is the gospel in one word?” What one word would you use? Then, to the side, reflect on *why* you chose that word.

Ok, round 2. If you had to answer the question, “What is the gospel in one sentence?” What one sentence would you write? Again, to the side, reflect on *why* you wrote that sentence.

Ok, last round. If you had as much space and as many sentences as you wanted and had to answer the question, “What is the gospel?” what would you write? Use the space below to do so. For the last time, to the side, reflect on *why* you wrote that paragraph.

It’s probably a helpful exercise to sit and articulate what the gospel is because it’s so foundational to who we are as followers of Jesus. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, this gospel is of “first importance...” (1 **Corinthians 15:3**).

The gospel is at the core of who followers of Jesus are. Tomorrow, you’ll get some passages to dig into to help you think about what the gospel is according to various Scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments.

But, for now, we could just simply rest in knowing that the word “gospel” literally means “good news.”

But, what exactly is news? **News is something that happens in the past as a result of which everything is now different.** For example, when *news* broke that the Kansas City Chiefs won the Super Bowl this past year, everything was different. The way people viewed Patrick Mahomes changed; Coach Andy Reid’s legacy was cemented; and the Chiefs were now Super Bowl 54 champions – no one could

change that. Something had happened (the Chiefs winning) that as a result of which the present is now different.

In Jesus' day, the word "gospel" was a message and a declaration that went throughout the land where a great military victory was won or, in certain cases, when a new king was born. It was a proclamation that something has happened as a result of which the present is now different.

For our purposes here today, we can rest on the declaration that the core of the gospel is this: Jesus is Lord. That, in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, something happened as a result of which everything is different. A victory had been won. Sin, satan, and death have been vanquished. Jesus is King.

Ultimately, Caesar is not in charge, the President of America is not in charge, Jesus is. He is the cosmic ruler of the universe. As Christians, we shape our lives around the reality that Jesus is Lord.

Here are a few questions for you to consider:

1. What is an example of a piece of news that radically changed your life?
2. How is narrowing down the gospel to simply, "Jesus is Lord" compare and contrast to how you defined it above?
3. Has the phrase "Jesus is Lord" actually changed something in your life or is it just something you say with words? If so, what has changed? If nothing has changed, why not?

Day Two

Yesterday, we looked at defining the word gospel. Today, we are going to dive into some of the relevant passages in the Bible that use the word “gospel” to see if that helps us understand what that word means.

The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *basar* when talking about “good news.” In your translations, you might read it as being translated “good news,” “proclamation,” “glad tidings,” “to preach,” etc. And we see it all throughout the Scriptures.

Look up the following passages in the Old Testament and note to the side the way in which “good news” is used. What is happening in and around these verses? What sort of connotations does “good news” have according to these verses?

- **1 Samuel 31:1-9 (see verse 9)**
- **Psalm 68:1-12**
- **Isaiah 52:7-8**

Now, let’s do the same thing with some New Testament uses of the word gospel. Again, look up the following passages and note to the side the way in which “gospel” is used. What is happening in and around these verses? What sort of connotations does “good news” have according to these verses?

- **Mark 1:14-15**
- **Luke 2:8-11**
- **Acts 1:3; Acts 28:30-31**
- **Romans 1:1-4**

Are you noticing a theme here? Like we mentioned on Day One, the word “gospel” as it’s used in the Scriptures, carries notes of triumph, victory, kingdom, and ruling. In one of the Old Testament passages, we even saw that the word for “gospel” could be used in conjunction with the victory of the enemies of God’s people because for them it would indeed be “good news.” In the rest of the Old Testament passages, the word for “good news” indicates the reality that no one else reigns except God (**Isaiah 52:7**).

In the New Testament passages, this same idea is carried through. We read the word gospel and it is used with talk of kingdom, Jesus being the “Son of God in power,” Jesus being the “Messiah,” and so on.

Contrast this with different ways the gospel is talked about in our churches and you begin to see some discrepancies. Many people view “the gospel” as simply believe “x” so that your sins can be forgiven and so that you don’t go to the “bad place” – which has some truth to it! BUT, that presentation of the gospel is slightly incomplete and left a little lacking. The gospel is much bigger than that and much more encompassing. We’ll work our way into that some more tomorrow, but for now, here are a few questions for you ...

1. How do the above Scriptures and thoughts clarify for you what the gospel is?
2. What would it look like for you to view who you love, where you live, where you work, and how you parent through the lens of Jesus' lordship and God's kingdom?

Day Three

Every piece of news has a backstory. Imagine reading a headline out of a newspaper from 2016 that just said, “Cubs win the World Series!” If you had no cultural context for that statement, you might really be left confused. *Baby bears winning something? World series? Series of what? The whole world is involved? There was a world-wide competition of baby bears? What is happening here?*

You see how that could get slightly confusing, right?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is no different. It, too, comes with a story (both past and future) that helps shed light on its meaning and implication.

So what is that story? If you're able, take a few moments to watch this video from our friends at Bible Project (<https://bibleproject.com/videos/heaven-and-earth/>).

In the opening pages of the Bible, in Genesis 1 and 2, we read about God's good created world. In this world there was life, peace, responsibility, relationship, justice, and peace – all things that make for human flourishing were had in the Garden of Eden. Humanity was in right relationship with God, humanity was in right relationship with each other, and humanity was in right relationship with the Earth.

Humankind was given the responsibility to *rule* and *have dominion* over the Earth (see **Genesis 1:26, 28**). Unfortunately, they idolize themselves, wanting to be like God, and they rebel. Because of this act of rebellion and their faulty dominion, humanity's relationship with God, humanity, and the earth was fractured and broken (see **Genesis 3**). And this brokenness plays itself out throughout the entirety of the Old Testament as Israel is given the task to rule on God's behalf so long as they follow his rules and commandments. Time and time again, however, they fail.

Despite Israel's mishaps, mistakes, and disordered desires, it was foretold that a prophet like (but better than) Moses, a king like (but better than) David, and a priest like (but better than) Aaron would come to lead the people of God rightly – someone who wouldn't look to his own interests, but would live a life fully surrendered to God. This someone was referred to as Israel's Messiah. This is who the New Testament writers refer to Jesus as – the person who was fully surrendered to God's will, the person who would bring redemption and salvation to God's people, and the person who would reign and bring about God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

At the cross, then, we see that Jesus wins a decisive victory over evil, satan, sin, and death. There's no question that this is how the gospels portray the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and this is even a theme picked up by Paul and others (see **Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20**). With Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's story, having conquered over the dominion of darkness and with his having been enthroned as Lord of the universe, he is now bringing renewal and restoration to all of creation (**Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10**).

That story is a little different than how we talk about the gospel usually... The gospel isn't just that humans can go to heaven when they die. The gospel's implications bring about the redemption and restoration of all the entire cosmos since the entire cosmos was marred by sin (**Romans 8:20-21**). This is what is meant when we read about the coming of a New Heaven and New Earth (**Revelation 21**) with no more tears, death, or pain.

This is important for us to realize because if the gospel is *just* about “going to heaven when we die” then we miss out on all of creation being redeemed and restored. But, if our gospel message is Jesus’ lordship, then we get BOTH the forgiveness of sins *and* the redemption and restoration of all creation.

Below are a few reflection questions for today:

1. When you were growing up as a child, what was your perception of the gospel?
2. How does this day and the previous days compare or contrast to how you viewed the gospel growing up?
3. How does this background to the gospel change how you view Christ’s work on the cross?

Day Four

With the story surrounding the gospel announcement undergirding how we think about what the gospel is (that Jesus is Lord), one question we have to ask is, “How does knowing all of that change things for us?” There are two points to answer this question; we’ll cover one today and then wrap up this week with the second point tomorrow.

The first deals with our initial and ongoing response to Jesus’ lordship – this is what we call “faith.” But faith can be kind of a tricky word to really wrap our minds around.

If you had to define “faith,” how would you define it? Use the space below to do that.

Dallas Willard points out that in many churches, people live by what he calls “bar-code faith.” He says, “Think of the bar codes now used on goods in most stores. The scanner responds only to the bar code. It makes no difference what is in the bottle or package that bears it, or whether the sticker is on the ‘right’ one or not. The calculator responds through its electronic eye to the bar code and totally disregards everything else. If the ice cream sticker is on the dog food, the dog food is ice cream, so far as the scanner knows or cares.”

Many Christians view their belief of the gospel as just believing in the right things so that, when they are “scanned” so to speak at the pearly gates by God, they’ll be able to get into Heaven.

But this kind of thinking has led many Christian able to get into heaven without being very...well, heavenly. But faith and belief have more to do in our lives, hearts, and minds than just getting us into the good place. Faith is more than mental assent to some ideology or person; rather, faith is total trust.

For our purposes, when we think about the gospel as being “Jesus is Lord,” a good way we might define faith is by calling it “allegiance.” As Christians, we are to be allegiant, or faithful, in every aspect of our lives to King Jesus...total and complete surrender!

Obviously, this is no easy task. But if Jesus is our king, it only makes sense! As the gospel story shows us, we are in need of a good and loving king to rule over us and bring about peace and justice in our world. And Jesus does just that.

We can give our allegiance to him because we know that his nature is good, loving, and gracious – that he would never lead us astray, manipulate us, or laud his power over us. In surrendering to King Jesus, we surrender to love. Let’s end today with a few questions for you to consider:

1. How have you seen “bar-code” faith in your own life?
2. How does thinking about faith in terms of “allegiance” compare or contrast to how you thought about faith before?
3. In what ways are you allegiant to Jesus in your life? What things do you feel like pull your allegiance away from him?

Day Five

The famed story expert Bobette Buster once remarked, “Narrative is our culture’s currency; he who tells the best story wins.”

I remember hearing recently of a guy who visited the Dallas Cowboys stadium for a game and, in doing so, felt like he landed on “planet football.” He had never been to a professional football game before so going to this game was eye-opening for him. He said that *everything* in and around AT&T Stadium was telling a compelling story to try and *bolster* the allegiance of people who were already Cowboy fans and to *win* the allegiance of people who weren’t.

How did the Cowboys tell this story?

Well, this guy went on to explain how everything from the parking lot banners with the big, blue Dallas Cowboy star on them, to the memorabilia you could buy everywhere outside and inside the stadium, to the amount of people sporting Cowboys apparel, to the cheerleaders urging the fans to cheer for their hometown team, to the giant endzone to endzone screen to pump up the crowd inside of the stadium and to show only positive Dallas Cowboy plays *on* that screen, to former Cowboy players coming out at halftime to help invigorate the crowd all told a compelling narrative... *THIS is our year. We have the guys to win. We can beat any team. We need your help.*

That was the story of the Cowboys. And they tell that story really well to win the allegiance of people everywhere. But, they’re not the only ones. If you just pay attention to the companies, organizations, and people around you, you’ll see that everyone is telling a story to win, as one writer says, your “mind space and brand allegiance” because they know if they get *that*, then they’ve got your time, your money, your support, and your evangelistic efforts. Just think about how die-hard sports fans will buy the apparel, spend time watching the games, voice their support for their teams, and then find any reason to talk about it with their friends!

With the gospel story in mind from Day Three, one thing that would be important for us to do as followers of Jesus would be to each reflect on what story or *stories* we are living out of. An important life axiom goes like this: *The story we live in is the story we will live out.*

We each have a story or a framework that we live by – this story could have been shaped for us by our family of origin, our culture, our nation, our friends, our desires, etc. Or...it could be some conglomeration of all of these.

Some people live according to the American Dream that, “I’m just concerned with my two kids, nice house, and white picket fence and nothing else”. And others live by materialism: “I’m concerning myself with what I can get out of life. Still others live by secularism believing that “God is not really involved with my everyday life.” And others believe in liberty, that “I’m only concerned with my own individual freedom in any and every matter.” The list goes on and on.

The question for us though is this: Are we living in accordance with our own story or in accordance with the story of God? Take a few moments and reflect on that with the questions below.

1. What is the story you feel as if you live by? How do these intersect with God’s story? Why are you living by that story/framework?

2. How does Jesus' lordship affect those other stories?
3. What are some practical ways you can begin to adjust your story to align more with Jesus' story?