

The Good News

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Introduction.

- A. There's an old saying that goes, "No news is good news." In a sense, this is true. For instance, if I don't happen to hear from my parents or any of the other members of my immediate family for a while, I'm not terribly concerned about that. I assume that they're just going about their business, and everything's fine. By contrast, though, if I get a phone call from one of them in the middle of the night, my heart speeds up.
- B. However, that old saying is certainly not true in all circumstances. What it really assumes is that everything is going well right now, so any departure from the status quo can only be bad. When things aren't going well right now, though, then the news we get may very well be good.
- C. This is the case with the good news of the gospel. It is "good news," quite literally, because that's what the Greek word translated as "gospel" means. Strangely enough, though, despite the goodness of the news, it's something that we very often forget to talk about. For example, everything I preach here is in some way related to the gospel, but most of those sermons aren't about the basic message of the gospel itself. In fact, I think this can be a spiritual struggle for all of us. We're so used to doing our Christian thing that we don't really think about why we're doing it. Let's change all of that up this morning. Let's hear the good news.

I. What Is It?

- A. Before we go any farther, we need to figure out just what the good news is. In a general sense, everything between the covers of the Bible is part of the gospel, but we can use the term much more narrowly than that. Perhaps the best expression of the good news in this narrow sense appears in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Even though this particular quotation is only two verses long, it has many ideas packed into it. The first is that it tells us who the good news is about: Christ. This, of course, is the title of Jesus. It describes Him as the Anointed One, someone who was chosen by God to be God's prophet, priest, and king simultaneously.
- B. The next idea in this statement of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. The basic action here, the Anointed One of God dying, seems like a strange occurrence. After all, couldn't God have kept Jesus safe? The point that Paul makes, though, is that the death of Jesus did not occur without purpose. Instead, He died for our sins. We had lived in a way that displeased God and merited punishment, but Jesus took the punishment of death on Himself. This too seems unlikely. After all, it's the subjects who die for the king, not the king for the subjects. Paul explains, though, that this death took place according to the Scriptures. Prophets from thousands of years ago predicted that Jesus would do exactly that. His death on the cross is evidence not of a cosmic mix-up, but of the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.
- C. The third major element here is that Jesus rose from the dead, also according to the Scriptures. This too is a strange claim. It's been estimated that since the beginning of the human race, about 12 billion of us have been born. Of those 12 billion people, Jesus is the only one to die and rise, never to die again. It's not the sort of thing that we might naturally believe. That's where the Scriptures step in again. Just as they predicted His death, they warned God's people to expect His resurrection, and once again, things went according to God's plan. Once we accept the resurrection of Jesus as fact, a number of things logically follow from that. First, Jesus' resurrection proves beyond a doubt that He was really the Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Second, it shows that Jesus is backed by all the power of God, so we can be sure that whatever Jesus promises us, He has the capacity to fulfill. Third, it shows that our resurrection from the dead is possible.
- D. The idea that Jesus Christ died and was raised makes the gospel an impressive message, but the good news is not just impressive. It is exclusive. Look at what Jesus says in John 14:6. Throughout the world, humankind almost universally engages in a search for the divine. Uncountable religions have been developed as a means of coming into contact with God. Jesus says, though, that of all of those variations, only belief in Him has the hope of success. He is the only pathway to God, and any faith except in Him is a deluded failure.

II. Why Is It Good?

- A. Now that we know what the good news says, we need to figure out what makes it good. Once more, we can turn to the apostle Paul for help. Look at what he says in Ephesians 2:4-6. The news is good because of what will happen to us when we listen to it. It's not a minor problem for us to be outside of Christ. It's a huge problem, because without Jesus in our lives, we are dead in our trespasses and sins. God takes our violation of His law so seriously that He will condemn us to hell eternally if He finds us guilty.
- B. However, as just as God is, He is equally merciful, and devised a way for us to escape the death penalty. When we obey the gospel, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we are raised from our state of spiritual death. In addition, we are elevated to the same position as Christ: adopted children of God, and brothers and sisters of Jesus. Instead of continuing as rebels against the Creator, we become part of His family.

- C. Folks, there is no other piece of news ever told that can promise such an immeasurable change for the better. Without the gospel, we are headed for eternal death. With the gospel, we are headed for eternal life with God. We call it the good news, because next to it, there is no other news that deserves to be called good.

III. What Should We Do?

- A. Once we reach this point in our understanding of the gospel, the next logical thing we ask is what we should do about it, whether we are disciples already or not. For disciples, we need to begin by resolving to **BE UNASHAMED** of the gospel. Paul describes his own resolve in this area in Romans 1:16. He's not ashamed of the gospel because only the gospel offers the hope of salvation. This should show up in our lives in two ways. First, we should never try to conceal the fact that we're Christians. If we hide that, friends, just why are we hiding it? Typically, when we make good decisions, we love to tell others about it. If we found a steal at the garage sale last week, or our investments have done well for the past year, we usually manage to find a way to work that into conversation with our friends and neighbors. Those decisions may well have been good, but friends, becoming a disciple of Jesus is the best decision we can possibly make. Why would we hide that?
- B. Second, if we truly believe that the gospel is the good news, we won't be ashamed to tell others about it so they can have it too. There might be acquaintances and co-workers in our lives whom we really don't care for, but how many of them do we want to see burning in the fires of hell forever? And yet, we might be the only Christian on the planet who ever has the opportunity to teach them. When the stakes are so high and the alternatives are so clear, how can we possibly let our embarrassment cause us to conceal the truth?
- C. Second, if we have the gospel, we need to **BE WORTHY** of the gospel. Paul brings this point up in Philippians 1:27. Basically, we need to live up to the standard that Jesus set when He gave His life for us. Do we, or is our everyday conduct something that we SHOULD be embarrassed about? The other day, when I was trying to track down Christine Alsip in the day surgery unit at St. Joe's, the ladies who were trying to help me were co-workers of our own Pam Hines. As I do in circumstances like that, I worked spiritual things into the conversation as much as I could, and at the end, I told them that if they ever wanted to visit with me more, they could get in touch with me through Pam. At that, one of them replied, "That's for sure; if I mention that to her, she'll have me over to you before I can blink." Now, I've never seen either of those ladies inside this building, and I may never, but at least they know that Pam is a godly woman who cares about their souls. If some preacher got into a conversation with one of our co-workers, would they say the same about us?
- D. Third, we need to **LABOR** for the gospel. Look at the example Paul provides in Philippians 4:2-3. Notice that this isn't just a preacher thing, or even a man thing. The unfortunate Euodia and Syntyche were women, but whatever problems they may have had with each other, they were workers for the gospel. Are we? If Paul were to come to Margaret St., would he praise us as laborers for the gospel, or would he condemn us as lazy lukewarm bumps on a log who are only good for filling a pew sometimes? Folks, whatever other things we may lack at Margaret St., we have no shortage of things to do. Some of them are very public, some are very private, but all of them offer us a way that we can join in the work of the gospel. Let's be sure to do that.
- E. Fourth, sometimes, we even need to **SUFFER** for the gospel. Consider Paul's admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:8. This is not necessarily a popular notion in the church today. There are a lot of Christians who are willing to play the part of the disciple, provided it doesn't inconvenience them too much or cut into what they want to do. Folks, that's not the attitude that the first-century church had. They risked losing all their property, imprisonment, and even death for the cause of Christ, and they did it willingly, not because they were blind, irrational fanatics, but because they were wise enough to know what really mattered. They knew that next to the eternal reward promised by the good news of Christ, that no possible suffering here was important enough to register. Do we believe that? Do we believe that we will have unimaginable joy if we remain true to the gospel? Or is our faith so weak that we would rather put the gospel behind our own convenience? Brethren; Jesus suffered death for us. The least we can do is suffer inconvenience for Him.
- F. All of these have been things that those who are already disciples need to do for the gospel. However, there's one last thing that those who are not disciples need to do, and that's **OBEY** the gospel. We see this, among other places, in 1 Peter 4:17. As we've already seen, the gospel is a very expensive item of good news. It cost God His Son and Jesus His life. They went through all of that pain and sorrow just to give us the chance to escape the death that every one of us has earned. Every one of us can take advantage of the opportunity that they have provided. Folks, if somebody wants to get baptized, I am on call at any hour of the day or night, and so is Jesus. They are eager for us to take that opportunity and run with it.
- G. And yet, many do not. They know what the message of the gospel says. They know what the ramifications of disobedience are. And yet, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, they choose not to listen. When I think about that, folks, that bothers me, but let me tell you, any anger I feel about that is nothing next to the anger that God feels about that. He has done literally everything He can for us, and yet so many people would rather rush heedlessly to their eternal doom like lemmings off a cliff. And make no mistake, folks; God will condemn people like that without an ounce of pity in His heart. They don't deserve it.

Conclusion. Don't take the gospel lightly. Obey it this morning.