

HAVE I GOT GOOD NEWS!

By Rev. Will Nelken

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When Jesus began His public ministry, on a Saturday in a local synagogue, He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah to the 61st chapter and read from the first two verses.

Isaiah 61

¹ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. ² He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.

When He had finished reading, He closed the scroll and said to the people, *"This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes!"* (Luke 4:21). He was declaring that this was His God-given purpose and design. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit in order to bring Good News to people.

The same anointing (the power of the Holy Spirit) has been given to the Church, to all who receive it, *"to tell people everywhere"* the Good News about Jesus (Acts 1:8).

Gospel = Good News

The word "gospel" comes from the Old English "god-spell" and means "good news".

What is this "Good News"? Let me describe it from three perspectives: God's, a sinner's, and a Christian's.

From God's perspective:

- I created the heavens and the earth, and it was good.
- I created the land and the seas, and it was good.
- I created the plants and trees and fruit, and it was good.
- I created the birds and fish and beasts, and it was good.
- I created humans, male and female, and it was *very* good.
- People are My delight because I made them in my image, and we can have fellowship.
- I love to care for them and bless them. I love to see them grow and create.
- When they ask Me, I love to help them and provide for them.
- I am their Father and their best Friend.

From a sinner's perspective:

- I have been selfish and rebellious. I have sinned.
- I have not cared about what pleased God as much as I cared about what pleased me.
- I have tried to improve, but it has been short-lived.
- Some habits and hang-ups I could not seem to escape.
- I felt so guilty and ashamed that I could not experience God's love.
- Then I met Jesus Christ. He showed me God's love in a whole new way.
- Jesus died in my place, taking my guilt, exposing Himself to my shame, paying for my sins.
- He broke the bondage of sin and set me free—to be loved by God and to love God.
- He washed my conscience and healed my shame.
- He's building my confidence and my hope for tomorrow.
- He's given me life—everlasting life with God and all who serve Him.
- I did not deserve such love. I could not earn such kindness. Amazing grace!
- Jesus is my Savior! I've been redeemed.

From a Christian's perspective:

- I trust in God and follow His ways—not perfectly, but persistently.
- I still stumble in many ways, but I am growing—in faith and love.
- All along the way, God our Father covers me with His love.
- The Holy Spirit helps me in my weaknesses and teaches me the truth.
- Jesus comforts me in my sorrows and heals my diseases.
- God's grace is sufficient for me.
- To know Him is to love Him. He is faithful and He is beautiful.
- I worship God with all my heart!
- I invite God into my every circumstance, for He is a Shepherd and a Friend.
- Jesus is the way, the truth, the life—and that's good!

The Good News is for everyone. It's not just for the Jews; it's also for the Gentiles. It's not only for the sinners; it's also for the saints.

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation; it is also the power of God for living well.

The Letter to the Hebrews explains the Jewish theology of the Gospel. The Letter to the Romans details the theology of the Gospel for the non-Jews.

Romans 1 (CJB)

¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the Good News, since it is God's powerful means of bringing salvation to everyone who keeps on trusting, to the Jew especially, but equally to the Gentile.* ¹⁷ *For in it is revealed how God makes people righteous in his sight; and from beginning to end it is through trust—as the Tanakh puts it, "But the person who is righteous will live his life by trust."*

But Paul's Letter to the Galatians brings us face to face with the power of the Gospel. It's very common in Christian circles to assume that "the Gospel" is something mainly for non-Christians. We see it as a set of basic "ABC" doctrines that describe the way someone may enter the kingdom of God. We often assume that once we're converted, we don't need to hear or study or understand the Gospel—we need more "advanced" material. "But in this short letter," writes Pastor Tim Keller, "Paul outlines the bombshell truth that the Gospel is not only the ABCs of the new birth, it is also the A-to-Z of the Christian life. It is not only the way to *enter* the kingdom; it is the way to *live* as part of the kingdom. It is the way Christ transforms people, churches and communities."

Failing to live in obedience to God will cause spiritual problems, but relying on obedience to God will also cause spiritual problems.

The Gospel message is simply wonderful: we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted than we ever dared hope. Jesus Christ satisfied all that God demands of human beings (He fulfilled the Law of Life), and He offered all that God demands of sinners ("The soul that sins shall die."). God demonstrated His satisfaction by raising Jesus from the dead.

Ignoring God's way of life upsets the spiritual equilibrium in your life. But depending on your fulfillment of God's requirements is a giant misrepresentation of spirituality.

Therefore, to insist on Christ-plus-anything-else for full acceptance by God is to dismiss what God has done through Jesus Christ as insufficient or unnecessary. That is not the Gospel at all.

That is why Paul wrote to the Galatian churches as he did. He was astonished at their behavior. He was angry with the so-called know-it-alls who turned their heads with false teaching. Their instruction that the Gentile believers in Jesus must *also* become Jews (including circumcision and dietary restrictions—the whole shebang) dismantled the Gospel message entirely. They put the Galatian believers in the precarious position of losing what Paul had worked so hard to bring them—their salvation!

Ignoring God's way of life upsets the spiritual equilibrium in your life. And failing to live in obedience to God will cause spiritual problems. However, simply correcting those behaviors misses the Gospel and cannot create a right relationship with God.

For instance, if you think within yourself, "I have a problem. I shouldn't be doing 'xyz'. I need to stop doing that so God will accept me," you may have accurately identified a sinful behavior in your life, and you may be sincere about quitting it, but whether you are successful or not in making the change you have missed the Gospel.

What you are doing is relying on yourself and the changes you can make to get close to God, as in the old saying, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” In fact, this approach to “cleanliness” is nowhere near godliness. Self-improvement is sin, insofar as it keeps self on the throne and keeps God at a distance.

The reality is that we are lost and helpless. That is why the Bible says, “*Jesus gave his life for our sins, just as God our Father planned, in order to rescue us from this evil world in which we live. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.*” (Galatians 1:4-5). The founders of other religions came to teach, not to rescue. Jesus was a great teacher, but there is no mention of that here. “Rescue” implies our utterly helpless condition.

The average person on the street believes that a Christian is a person who follows Jesus’ teaching and example, but Paul implies that is impossible. If you see someone drowning, it is useless to offer instructions on how to swim. You need to jump in and rescue her. Jesus is not so much a teacher as He is a rescuer. And that’s what we need the most. Nothing in who we are or what we do can save us. If it could, then Jesus is unnecessary and His death on the cross was pointless.

Depending on your fulfillment of God’s requirements, or relying on your obedience to God as a means of gaining His favor is a giant misrepresentation of spirituality. It perverts the Gospel. Again, it suggests that we can get back to God on our own, with just a little determination and self-discipline.

But Paul teaches that Jesus rescued us when He “*gave His life for our sins.*” This method of rescue was substitutionary in nature. The word “for” means “on behalf of” or “in the place of.” This substitution is what makes the Gospel revolutionary! Christ’s death was not just a general one; it was a substitution. Jesus didn’t merely buy us a second chance, giving us another shot at getting life right or staying right with God. In His death, Jesus did *all* we needed to do, all we should have done, but cannot do. In the words of an old chorus, “He paid a debt He did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay.”

God accepted the death of Christ on our behalf and raised Him from the dead to show it. Then He gave us salvation with grace and peace. This is the order of the gospel: God accepts us, and *then* we follow Him. Other religious systems have it the other way around: We must give God something, and *then* He accepts us. This is true for the sinner and true for the child of God. If we ever add *any* requirement to the grace of God in order to return to Him, we will reverse the order and nullify the Gospel.

That’s why God gets all the glory forever. As Keller comments, “If we contributed to our rescue... if we had rescued ourselves... or if God had seen something deserving of rescue, or useful for His plan, in us... or even if we had simply called out for rescue based on our own reasoning and understanding... then we could pat ourselves on the back for the part we played in saving ourselves. But the biblical gospel—Paul’s gos-

pel—is clear that salvation, from first to last, is God’s doing. It is His calling; His plan; His action; His work. And so it is He who deserves all the glory, for all time.

“This is the humbling truth that lies at the heart of the Gospel. We love to be our own saviors. Our self-centered hearts love to manufacture glory for themselves. So we find messages of self-salvation extremely attractive, whether they are religious (*Keep these rules and you earn eternal blessing*) or secular (*Grab hold of these things and you’ll experience blessing now*). The gospel comes and turns them all upside down. It says: *You are in such a hopeless position that you need a rescue that has nothing to do with you at all.* And then it says: *God in Jesus provides a rescue which gives you far more than any false salvation your heart may love to chase.*”

The Good News of Christianity—the message of Christ—brings us lower and raises us higher than we can imagine, or could ever achieve on our own. That’s why God deserves your praise. That’s why all the glory belongs to Him alone, forevermore.