



What is the Gospel?

A person off the street asks you, “what is the Gospel?”

How do you answer?

At Grace Vancouver Church, the Gospel is our greatest treasure- it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

The ‘Third Way’ of the Gospel. The gospel means ‘good news.’ It is the basic message that: ‘God made (Christ), who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (II Corinthians 5:21). The gospel says that we are so sinful, lost and helpless that only the life and death of the Son of God can save us. But it also says that those who trust in Christ’s work instead of their own efforts are now ‘holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation’ (Colossians 1:22-23).

The gospel tells us that our root sin is not just failing in our obedience to God but relying on our obedience to save us. Therefore, the gospel is a ‘third way,’ neither religion nor irreligion. The religious person may say, ‘I am doing the right things that God commands’ and the irreligious person may say, ‘I decide what is right and wrong for myself.’ But both ways reject Jesus as Savior (though they may revere him as Example or Helper). Both ways are strategies of self-salvation—both actually keep control of their own lives. So the gospel keeps us from legalism and moralism on the one hand and from hedonism and relativism on the other.

The Gospel’s Power for Change. The gospel is not just the ‘A-B-C’ but the ‘A-Z’ of the Christian life. The gospel is not just the way to enter the kingdom but is the way to address every problem and is the way to grow at every step. If we believe we can find our own worth and meaning through performance, then we will become either proud and disdainful of others (if we reach our goals), or else discouraged and self-loathing (if we fail our goals). But the Gospel creates an entirely new self-image.

First, it tells us that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared to hope— at the same time. In fact, if the gospel is true, the more you see your sin, the more certain you are that you were saved by sheer grace and the more precious and electrifying that grace is to you. So the gospel gives us enormous power to admit our flaws. Then secondly, the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes (for

the first time) the law of God a beauty instead of a burden. We come to use it to delight the One who has enriched us so mightily, instead of using it to get his attention or win his favor. The first way makes the moral and sacrificial life a joy; the second way makes it a burden.

Therefore the gospel changes everything. It brings down racial barriers by melting away racial pride OR inferiority. It brings down psychological problems by melting away self-inflation OR self-hatred. It brings down personal facades, for we are free to admit who we are. It effects the way we do everything . . . — how we motivate people, how we help them work through counseling problems, how we worship, how we take criticism.”

–The Centrality of the Gospel, by Tim Keller

The “Four-Chapter Story” of the Bible Broader Narrative

“There is no point in converting people to Christ if they do not convert their vision of the world and of life, since Christ then becomes merely a symbol for all that we love and want already-without Him. This kind of Christianity is . . . terrifying.”

–Alexander Schmemmann

Individual Approach	Broader Narrative Approach
God & Man Sin & Salvation (2 part story)	Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration or Ought, Is, Can and Will Be (4-chapter story)

Yes, the Gospel of Jesus Christ includes the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of God to humans... but... **is that all that it includes?**

Could it include the proclamation of a new reign and dominion that means to redeem all of creation, all that is broken about it, all that is fallen, broken, unjust, evil and inhumane?

What is the Gospel?

Answer: The Good News of the Kingdom of God

Is your Gospel too small?

(a talk by Pastor Mike Hsu to a group of evangelical university students)

We cannot just stop at converting people to Christ and we cannot just stop at seeing that they become worshippers of Christ,... but they must become disciples and followers of Christ as well who go into the world and proclaim the presence of a new reign.

They do it not just by talking about it, though telling others about this new reign is important, ... but they do it by engaging every aspect of life offering foretastes of the Coming Kingdom in all that they do. Your primary Kingdom activity is not to write a check at the end of your work week and give it to your church... if that's all you see to worship then you've missed it.

The reign of a new King means to penetrate every facet and sphere of life: our workplaces, our communities, our neighborhoods, etc. Yes, to the farthest reaches of the earth, to the nations,... but also to the farthest reaches of our spheres of influence, what we might call vocational spheres. Vocation means calling and if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then all of life is calling, ... all of it, not just Sunday mornings and not just the Wednesday night Bible Study, and not just the check you write to the missionary, but all of life wherever you are and wherever God calls.

"There is not one square inch of the universe over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all does not cry, 'mine!" - Abraham Kuyper

The term "Gospel" was not originally a religious word. It meant the heralding of news of a historical moment that had transpired. In Greek literature, the heralding of such news usually revolved around a Great War Victory or the ascension of a new King. So an inscription has been found, "The beginning of the gospel of Caesar Augustus."

Author and pastor Tim Keller writes:

"Emperors who had ascended to power or who put down a threat would send out heralds announcing the good news about the strength or inauguration of the kingdom. That messenger would always be proclaiming some historical event which would introduce a radical new state of affairs, a new situation for the people, for they now had to relate to him as king."

If you are going to use the term Gospel, you have to find a way to incorporate the language of a Kingdom... of a new reign into what you are calling people to. It's not just about getting a "get out of jail free card," but a radical new state of affairs into which God calls us.

I think to do this, you have to move from the historical to the personal, rather than vice versa. Think with me on how most of us have heard the message of Christ shared, we've begun with the personal, right? For me in college, it was hearing the Four Spiritual Laws through Campus Crusade,... for you guys it's probably the Bridge diagram, right?

What do the two Gospel presentations have in common? They begin with the personal, "God, Man, Sin and Christ," right? What if we begin with the historical first, not so much "God, Man, Sin and Christ,"... we can get there, I'm not saying the tools aren't helpful, but what if we started with "Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration"? We are thinking historically now, because I think peoples' questions often start with the historical, why is the world the way that it is,... why are Christians the way that they are? Why is there evil in the world and why has the Church often been associated with coercive power, Crusades, Inquisition and today power politics?

For some it works to begin by telling them they are sinful, but for most it does not... you can get there, and you will ... but start by telling them about a world made good, but perverted because of Rebellion. Tell them that Christ came to restore the world once again by announcing His authority and reign, one that would bring back universal peace and flourishing ... and that this is the trajectory of history the new King has set,... Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.

Yes, there is a confession of sin and need for Christ in all of it, the call for repentance, for that is what Jesus is preaching, that as the Kingdom draws near, repentance is required. We only see our part in this grand narrative of Christ's redemption if we own up to our own waywardness from the God of heaven and our desperate need to be reconciled to God in Christ. But I think, in most situations, it's more effective to start with the historical and then move to the personal and not vice versa. For one, it makes more sense to people in our evangelistic efforts as we talk to others about Christ's love for the world and for two, it paints a broader and more accurate picture of the entirety of the work of God in the world and for all of human history.