

SERMON TITLE: Words of Witness (Part 4)

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SCRIPTURE: Selected Scriptures

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Not a day goes by that we aren't shaped by words—words spoken to us, words on the news, words on social media, our own words. We're shaped by words because there is a mysterious and yet certain power in them. The Bible says that there is life and death in the power of the tongue. Words are used to build up and give life. Or, sometimes, they're used to tear down and take life. So, how can we be sure that we are speaking life to others? How can we avoid words that cut and tear down? How can we know we are honoring God with what comes out of our mouths? Answer: God himself is not silent. He is the God who speaks. In Scripture and ultimately in Jesus, we have God's holy communication to us. His word should be the primary thing that shapes our words so that others might find life in him.

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Here are the three questions I'm going to ask and answer today. What is the Gospel message? How is this message communicated in the New Testament? How does understanding all this help us share the Gospel more effectively with others?

*What is the Gospel message?* The Gospel is the Good News about Jesus—what he did for us and how it changes our lives. READ 1John 1:1-3. Now, let's break down that working definition above into its two main parts. First, the Gospel is the "Good News" about Jesus Christ. In other words, the Gospel says something about—

1. Who Jesus is...
2. What he did for you in his life, death, and resurrection...
3. What he promises to do for you if you put your trust in him...
4. And, what he will do in the future when he returns to set right all that's wrong in this world.

When you read the Gospels and the New Testament Letters, you'll find that this is the summary outline of the Good News story about Jesus. And, contrary to what some scholars will tell you, it's a summary that all the New Testament writers agree on. It's not articulated all in one place or in one passage, but you can easily put it together from what's written down for us. Let me show you.

*The Gospel according to Matthew Mark, Luke, and John<sup>[1]</sup>*

*Who is Jesus?* Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God (Mark 1:1), the Savior of both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 2:30-32), the one who was in the beginning with God and who was God (John 1). Jesus left his place in heaven and became one of us (John 1:14).

*What did Jesus do for us?* Jesus died in our place as a substitutionary ransom for 'the many' (Mark 10:45). In this life, he conquered the demonic present age with its sin and evil (Mark 1:14-2:10) and he sets people free to enjoy the life of God.

*What does he promise those who trust in him?* Jesus promises forgiveness (Luke 24) and abundant, eternal life (John 3:16) to all who turn from their sin and trust him as their Savior. We are no longer under the condemning judgment of God (John 5:24).

*What will he do in the future?* One day, Jesus will return to renew this broken world and set right all that's wrong in this world (Matthew 19:28). That is the Gospel according to the Gospel writers. And, the apostle Paul preached the same Good News.

*The Gospel according to the Apostle Paul*

*Who is Jesus?* Jesus was the promised Messianic King and the Son of God who left heaven and came to earth as a servant in human form (Romans 1:3-4; Philippians 2:4ff).

*What did Jesus do for us?* By his death and resurrection, Jesus atoned for our sin and secured our justification by grace, not by works (1 Corinthians 15:3; Ephesians 2:8-9).

*What does he promise those who trust him?* We are justified/declared right with God by faith, not works (Romans 5 and Ephesians 2), and we are no longer under the condemning judgment of God (Romans 8:1).

*What will he do in the future?* When Jesus comes back, he will judge the world in righteousness (Romans 2:16) and he will renew all of creation and give us new, resurrected bodies (Romans 8:18ff; 1 Corinthians 15).

So, contrary to what some people might say—there is one, true Gospel message taught by all the writers of the NT. Meaning, the core message of the “Gospel of the Kingdom” found in the Synoptic Gospels and “The Gospel of Eternal Life” as taught by John and Paul’s “Gospel of Justification by Faith” in Jesus is the same Gospel. It’s one message, said in different ways, in order to best connect with the different backgrounds of their intended audiences. Tim Keller summarizes the one message of the Gospel in this way: “Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplished salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin and into fellowship with him, and [one day] he [will] restore [all of] creation, in which, we [will] enjoy our new life together with him forever.” I think that’s pretty good. That message comes through loud and clear in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, and with all the New Testament writers.

Now, of course, no summary contains everything you can say about a subject. And no doubt some of you ‘scholars’ and Bible nerds are saying, “But he left out this or that” or “But, he didn’t say anything about the Holy Spirit! What about the Holy Spirit?” I hear you. But this is a summary focusing on Jesus, and a summary doesn’t tell you everything. The summary simply helps us see the main points. So, if you think something should be added to this summary, I encourage you to spend some time thinking this through for yourself and feel free to add anything you think should be added. But here’s where I’m going with all this—The Gospel is the story of the Good News about Jesus—(1) who he is, (2) what he did for you in his life, death, and resurrection, (3) what he promises to do *for you* if you put your faith in him, and (4) what he’s going to do for the whole world when he comes back.

Now, the second part of our definition of the Gospel message—the Gospel message is the story of what Jesus did for us—“AND how it intersects with our lives.” Theologians talk about *salvation accomplished* and *salvation applied*—meaning—what Jesus *accomplished* for us through his death and resurrection is *applied* to us when we place our faith in him. Remember 1 John 1:1-3? John said those first believers saw, heard, and touched the Word of Life (Jesus) that met them at every level of their lives. Jesus moved among them and his life touched their lives in many different ways—giving them many Gospel stories to tell and many sides of his glory to wonder at. They had personal encounters with Jesus that intersected their lives in profoundly powerful ways, and that enabled them to share the Gospel in profoundly, powerful ways. They personally experienced Jesus at every level of their lives and so they talked about the one Gospel in more ways than one. What do I mean by that?

*How is this one Gospel message communicated in the New Testament?* The writers of the New Testament talked about Jesus in concrete, real-life ways, using metaphors and images and word pictures familiar to their hearers and readers. And these word pictures helped different people connect to Gospel truth in different ways. ...Read Ephesians 1:3-8 to see three words pictures (adoption, redemption, forgiveness) that Paul hangs in his Gospel art gallery to help us understand how what Jesus has done for us changes our lives

I’m reading a book by a man named Neil Livingstone entitled, “Picturing the Gospel.” This book has informed and shaped a lot of what I’m sharing with you this morning. Neil has a chart in the back of his book that lists out Nine Gospel Images or word pictures that are a part of Paul’s awe-inspiring art gallery. They are broken into three groups. (This chart is included in a pdf attached in these Sermon Notes)

#### Images of New Life

- Life — In Christ, God has given you what is really life—new, true, abundant, and eternal life.
- Adoption/Sonship — In Christ, you are welcomed into God’s family
- Kingdom — In Christ, you have been called into a new world order.

These three images help us see *what we are saved for*—abundant/eternal life—membership in God’s family—and citizenship in the coming kingdom of God.

#### Images of Mercy and Restoration

- Justification — In Christ, you have been declared right with God—“not guilty” before God.
- Forgiveness — In Christ, God has wiped out your debt.
- Atonement — Jesus has offered for us the perfect gift to God. He became our sacrificial lamb.

These three images help us see *what we are saved from*—they show us how God has cleared the way for us to know him and enjoy the life Jesus died to make possible by dealing with indwelling sin and how we need to be saved from ourselves.

#### Images of Deliverance

- Salvation — In Christ, God has rescued you from judgment and to new life.

- Ransom and Redemption — Jesus has bought your freedom at the great price of his own life.
- Freedom — In Christ, God has set you free from anything and everything that binds you.

These three images help us see *what/who we are saved by*. We're saved by our divine hero—Jesus, who rescues us from sin, death, hell, and all the forces of spiritual evil in this present world. We are saved by our Savior Jesus, who laid down his life for us and bought us at great cost to himself—our Savior, who came to set the captive free both now and forever.

—SO—

*How does understanding these Gospel word pictures help us share the Gospel more effectively with others?* They give us a rich Gospel vocabulary for understanding the work God has done in our own lives and for how he can work in the lives of the people we talk to about Jesus. All these word pictures are “words of witness” that tell the same Good News stories of Jesus in different ways. “Too often we let the Gospel shrink down to one flat outline and a story about what happened to us once a long time ago. And then we wonder why neither we nor our friends are excited about it. But if we could see all these amazing pictures of what Christ has done, we’d realize that there’s a lot more good news in the Bible, and more good news in our lives, than we ever thought” (Neil Livingstone).

The Gospel you know is much richer and deeper and personal than simply the Gospel you heard when you first came to Jesus for salvation. Every day, you experience the truth behind the metaphors of eternal life, having God as your Heavenly Father, the hope of “kingdom come,” peace with God knowing God has declared you “not guilty” and there is no condemnation when you sin, etc. One or more of these word pictures drew you to Christ in the past, but they are also the ways you see and hear and receive the touch of Jesus in the present. We are walking Gospel art galleries for the people we rub shoulders with every day. And, these words pictures are all ways you can share the Gospel with excitement and deep conviction as God gives you the opportunity. Understanding the Bible’s art gallery of Gospel images is the key to knowing Jesus personally and making him known in ways that will be personal to those with whom we share. These word pictures are all Words of Witness. These are God’s words that should shape our words.

“They are not idle words for you; they are your life” (Deuteronomy 32:47).

#### Discussion Starters

1. Open your discussion time with this question: “How would you summarize what Charlie taught about sharing the Gospel this morning?” Don’t stop with one person’s answer. Ask others in the group to summarize the message in their own words. Don’t stop until 3-4 people do this. Ask follow-up questions.
2. Ask the people in your group, “Which of the Gospel metaphors you heard this morning means the most to you?”
3. How do we become “walking Gospel art galleries” to the people we rub shoulders with every day? What does that even mean?
4. How and when would using the Gospel word picture be helpful to someone you are talking with about Jesus?
5. How and when would using the Gospel metaphor of redemption and the forgiveness of sins be helpful to someone you are talking with about Jesus?
6. How and when would using the Gospel word picture of the Kingdom be helpful to someone you are talking with about Jesus?
7. How does understanding and experiencing the truth of these Gospel word pictures help you be a more effective witness for Christ?

<sup>[i]</sup> Adapted from Simon Gathercole, “The Gospel of Paul and the Gospel of the Kingdom,” in *God’s Power to Save*, ed. Chris Green, IVP 2006).