

Lessons in Salvation -- Lesson 2 "What is the Good News of the Gospel?"

NOTE: Don't rush this lesson. If you feel it appropriate, take two weeks or longer if you wish to go over this material.

Introduction:

The word "gospel" means good news of salvation. Last week we looked at the bad news – we need salvation because of our sin. This week we look at the means God uses to bring us the good news.

Read this passage at least five times then answer the questions as best you can:

NKJ 1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. (1Co 15:1-8 NKJ)

In verse three what is the first point of the Gospel?

The first point of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

Why did Christ die? Why is it important that He died?

Recall from Genesis 1-3, God created humanity in His image. And humanity sinned and violated God's law. Our first parent's sin not only affected all humanity but also affected all creation. For God to redeem His creation, sin had to be dealt with. Recall that in Genesis 2:16b-17, God said, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Our sin earns death (See Rom 6:23). Recall that when God promised to send a redeemer to take away our sin, and the consequences of sin in this world and in our lives in Gen 3:15, that the price for the crushing of Satan's head and the redemption of God's people would be the death of the one who crushes Satan. Recall that in Gen 3:21, God killed an animal spilling its blood to cover the sin and shame of our first parents. The principal seen here, and throughout all the scriptures, through the sacrificial system of the Old Testament is that sin can only be atoned for by death.

Atonement means to make satisfaction for sin. Jesus by His death did that by paying the price of sin, which is death. But He also lived the perfect life we could not live. Jesus was true man and true God. He lived in this sinful world and did so perfectly for us. He succeeded in every place we have failed. And so, He has positive righteousness to give us. In 2 Cor 5:21, we are told that, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." That is what many in the history of the church have called the "great exchange." Jesus, on the cross took our sin upon himself. God is just and righteous and cannot let sin go unpunished. He would not be good and loving if He did so. So He upheld His justice and righteousness by sending Jesus to die for the sins of His people. But He also shows us His mercy by giving us the perfect life and death of Jesus so we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus took our sin and shame, and He gives us His righteousness and holiness.

What does "according to the Scriptures" mean?

It means that Paul did not make this up. It means that the Old Testament told us all about these things. Read Isaiah 53. Notice how similar it is to what we read in 1 Cor 15:1-5. Isaiah prophesied the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ 700 years before it happened! The Bible tell us what we are to believe about us and about God. The scriptures tell us how we can glorify God and enjoy Him forever. It tells us what God has done for us in Christ, and how God wants us to respond to His love.

Consider 2 Tim 3:14-17, "14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." The bible is the authoritative, God-breathed, inspired, and sufficient source to teach us what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

What is the second point of the Gospel found in verse 4a?

Christ was buried.

What does the fact that Jesus was buried mean for us?

It is important because it shows us that Jesus truly died a human death as the punishment of sin. He really died. His heart and brain functions truly ceased. The Man Christ Jesus truly died. He had to truly die to pay for the penalty of sin which is death. The fact that He was truly dead and buried shows that the payment was truly made for our sins.

Other religions such as Islam deny that Christ really died (Surah 4:157). Death is required to make satisfaction for sin. No death, no satisfaction. Death is an essential part of the equation. To get to satisfaction, to get to assurance, there must be a death. As God told Adam in Genesis 2:15-17 that he would die if he ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, so death came. Christ conquered death by His death and resurrection. Islam, for example, in denying Christ's death, places one's salvation in the hands of the sinner. That sinner can never do enough to make up, to satisfy for his sin.

It also shows us that Jesus was a true man. Jesus was not part man and part God. He was not a demagogue like a character from Greek mythology. Jesus was truly man. He is everything that makes a human a human. But He is also true God. He is everything that is God. He had to be true man to make atonement for humanity. And He needed to be true God to bear the eternal punishment our sins deserve.

Did His divine nature die? No. His divine nature cannot and could not die. When Christ took on His human nature, He did not give up His divine nature. He is both God and man, two natures in one person. This union of the divine and the human is only something that God could do. In Scripture we have the record of what God has done. Does God explain every aspect of this? No. But what He does tell us is clear, and this the church has affirmed since the apostles.

What is the third point of the Gospel found in verse 4b?

He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

What does the fact that Jesus rose again from the grave mean for us?

It means so many wonderful things that we could spend hours and hours only scratching the surface of it all. But first, it means that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was accepted by the Father. The wages of sin is death, but Jesus never sinned. He is righteous perfectly. He never sinned once in thought, word, and deed. Therefore, it would be unjust of the father to leave Christ in the grave. His resurrection proves that Jesus' work for us fulfilled all the righteousness sinners like us need to be justified, or, made right before the eyes and justice of our holy and loving God.

Second, because Jesus rose bodily, we also will rise bodily. In 1 Cor 15:20-23, Jesus is called the firstfruits of those who have "fallen asleep" or died. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, farmers would make a firstfruit offering of their crop or cattle. This was the first and best part of the harvest. And that was a guarantee that God would bring in the whole harvest as they gave and gave thanks to the Lord for His kindness to them. Jesus being called the first fruits is telling us that the resurrection of Jesus is the promise that we will all rise with Him, and the fullness of the harvest will come in. In other words, Jesus will save and raise all His people and be with Him as if the world is the field and we, His people, are His prized crop.

Third, it means that your humanity matters. Humanity matters so much to Jesus that He took on a true human nature and He is still a true human today. Your body matters to Jesus. Your humanity is held perfect before the right hand of God the Father by Jesus right now. And all in Christ will dwell in a glorified human body free from the effects sin for eternity.

And fourth, it means that death has been defeated. Death is an enemy. I know sometimes people well meaning say, "death is a natural part of life." But that is not true. Humanity was not created to die, but to live eternally with God. That is why we weep at funerals. We weep because the most unnatural thing in the world is for a human to die. But the resurrection tells us that death does not win. Jesus conquered death for us in His resurrection. And as 1 Cor 15:25-26 tells us, Jesus will put all His enemies including death under His feet.

A death without a resurrection is no different than that of every human who has ever lived. A death with a resurrection makes Christ unique among all men and especially among all other religious leaders of the various religions of the world. Mohammed is still dead. Buddha is still dead. Christ is alive. He rose from the grave. No other religious leader can make this claim. Therefore, Christ and His teachings found in the Scriptures of the Bible are unique and should be followed.

Why does Paul list those who saw the risen Christ (verses 5-8)?

He tells us this because the resurrection is not something we simply believe without evidence. The resurrection of Christ is a verified historical fact. When He wrote to the church in Corinth in the early 50's A.D. He is communicating that Jesus appeared to all these witnesses and says most of them are still alive. In other words, if you doubt, then ask one of them, there are over 500 to speak with.

Almost all historians, even non-believing historians know four things to be true. Jesus really lived, He was really crucified under Pontius Pilate, He was really buried, and His followers said they saw Him after He rose and Christianity spread like wildfire. So everyone in the world must deal with this question: Where is the body of Jesus? To end Christianity day one, all the Jews or the Romans would have had to do was go to the tomb of Jesus and bring His body. But they couldn't.

The most powerful minds of history have tried to disprove the resurrection and they have not been able to do so. There are five objections to the resurrection, and they can all be easily refuted. First, it was a conspiracy, in other words the apostles made it up. That does not work because again, where is the body? And considering how the apostles all, save one, who was exiled died as martyrs, what motive did they have? Second, it was a myth. Again, that does not work because where is the body? And the fact that there are living witnesses Paul tells his readers to speak with disproves that. Third, it was a hallucination. It is true that people do hallucinate, but not to 500 people at once. And when you read the gospels, the apostles or anyone else were expecting Him to rise. Consider Luke 24:1-27 where it says clearly, they did not expect Him to rise. So they would have had no reason or expectation to see Him so nothing to bring on the hallucination. But more importantly again, where is the body?

Fourth, the apostles stole the body. The tomb was guarded by a company of praetorian guards who were the navy seals of the day. If they abandoned their post, or allowed their post to be compromised, they would have paid for it with their life. And a group of untrained soldiers like the apostles, were able to make them see and angel, move the stone, and make them all run away in complete disregard for their lives from their post? That makes no sense and is impossible.

And finally, Jesus really didn't die on the cross. So somehow after being crucified and stabbed in the heart with a spear, with no medical care or treatment, was put in a tomb for three days, somehow then woke up, showing no signs of injury, moved the stone by himself, scared away the guards, and then began walking around like nothing? That again makes no sense and does not happen. No one survives crucifixion, because if someone did, the team who failed to kill Him in the crucifixion would be crucified.

The only truth that fits the data is that Jesus bodily rose from the grave. It is a historical fact that all the world must come to terms. If Jesus rose, it proves He is the God. And if He is God, we all are called to worship him with all our Heart, life, love, and mind.