**What Is the Gospel?**

**1 Cor. 15:1-10 & Luke 18:9-14**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is the Gospel? Some might think that’s a silly question, but it really is not. Why is n***ot*** it a silly question? Because there are so many false ideas out there of what the Gospel really is.

Some say that the Gospel is preached when we’re told that Jesus’ died for sins. If they stopped there, that would be great, but they add things which are completely in error. Most especially they say that the Gospel is about your knowing what Jesus did, and includes now the things that you need to do to earn that sacrifice.

Others falsely teach that the Gospel is preached when you are told what Jesus has done to win your salvation – AND that now ***you*** must decide to accept Jesus into your heart.

Some believe the Gospel has nothing to do with Christ’s suffering and death, but only about His resurrection, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

Another group teaches that the Gospel is nothing more than telling of the life, suffering, and death of Jesus as the story of God’s love for us. It is proof that God loves all people and proves that God is taking everyone to heaven.

Of course, we also talk about the Gospel as being one of the first four books of the New Testament which tell of the life, work, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is indeed true.

It is good for us to say that the Gospel is Jesus’ life, suffering, death, and resurrection. But if we stop there, without applying Christ’s work of redemption to anybody, for what purpose did the Son of God take on human flesh, suffer, die, and rise again?

When I ask the question, "What is the Gospel?" I am referring to what Paul is calling the Gospel in our Epistle lesson. God inspires him to write: *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you.*

What is this Gospel he is speaking about? It is that by which they stand, indeed by which all Christians stand, and by which they are being saved.

Paul goes on to explain further: *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*

Paul delivers this – that Christ died for our sins! Proofs of Christ’s resurrection show that the grave could not hold Him. He who by His sinlessness did not deserve death, died in our behalf. When He was raised from the dead, it was a declaration that the sacrifice was accepted as the victory over death. This text is the first time in his letter to the Corinthians that Paul mentions the resurrection. He states at the beginning of this letter that he is determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. It is not until chapter fifteen that God moves Paul to mention the resurrection.

Many like to complain that they already know they are sinners. They complain that they have been told it all our lives, so they do not need to hear that anymore. “Tell us the good news,” they proclaim, “preach the Gospel.”

Many claiming to be Christians do not like the crucified Christ, they want the baby Jesus – or the resurrected Jesus – but not the crucified Lord. They think the Gospel is only about the good news of what Jesus did in His life. They don’t want – and they think they have no need for – the crucified Christ.

Dear friends, which approach do you take toward God? Do you take the approach of the Pharisee or the tax collector in our Gospel lesson? Do you stand before God with the list of the good things you have done? Or, do you fall on our knees with repentant hearts, throwing yourselves upon the mercy of our gracious God?

Too often we are the Pharisee! Yes, we know we are sinners, but we want to work out our salvation! We are independent and reliable! We know what it takes to have success! So, we apply that type of thinking to our faith life, we want to do our part. In fact, we figure that we ***have to*** do our share.

Do you believe that your salvation, that your forgiveness, that your standing before God is based upon what you do is called works righteousness. It is a trusting of self that has nothing to do with the Gospel. Such thinking is all about obedience to God’s Law. Yes we are to be obedient to God’s Law, nobody is saved by the law.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus says that one of the two in the temple that day went home justified. That is, one of them went home in a right relationship with God. It is the one who humbled himself and begged for mercy, declaring himself a sinner. It is the one who deemed himself unworthy even to lift his eyes to heaven. This one, recognizing his sinfulness, begs for mercy – he wants nothing but the Gospel. He knows full well that the Gospel is God’s mercy to grant forgiveness! God’s forgiveness is given, not because of the worthiness of the individual, but because of the riches of God’s grace.

When we believe that there is something that we do for our salvation – that is the Law. Saying, “Jesus died for you, now you must do your part and trust in Him,” is a law statement. Any prescriptive command of what we must do for God is law, and no one is saved by works of the law.

Do you remember from your catechesis what you learned about the law – that the law functions as a curb, mirror, and rule (or guide). The police officer who stops crimes is an example of the law functioning as a curb, stopping outbreaks of sin – both with believers and unbelievers. When people are shown their sinfulness, how they have broken the law, that is the law functioning as a mirror. The law can function as a mirror to both believers and unbelievers. Lastly the Law functions as a guide or rule for Christian life. Yes, the Law tells us how to live every aspect of our lives in thankfulness to God for all the He has done for us.

But even that third use is ***NOT*** the Gospel. Yes, we should live in accordance with God’s Law, especially now that we know what Christ endured and suffered for us. But to require us to do things to earn our place before God is the Law To say that anything we do determines whether we go to heaven or not is to base salvation on the law.

While it is true that the Gospel is all about what God has done in Christ Jesus to win for you the forgiveness of sins, if it is nothing more than an explanation, it does you no good. The Gospel is the good news ***delivered*** to you. Paul says, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.”

Christ died for your sins. Christ came to redeem you. He did all that He did so that forgiveness might be yours. The Gospel is not just ***in*** a book. The Gospel ***is not***just ***about*** Jesus. The Gospel ***is not*** simply talking ***about*** forgiveness. The Gospel is the forgiveness of sins that Jesus purchased for you ***and delivers to you***.

You can try and live by the law.

You can point to how good you are – especially compared to your unbelieving neighbor.

You can beg for and wait to be told how to live a better life, but you already know what to do – ***AND*** – you still fall again into sin.

You can hear how much God loves everybody and takes them all to heaven and then run away skipping and happy.

Every single one of those approaches will end in eternal disappointment.

Christ’s point in our Gospel less is that you should be like the tax collector, honest and truthful – God be merciful to me, a sinner. That is exactly what we did earlier. Together we confessed that we are poor miserable sinners! Now you can hear the Gospel, for you know that you need it. You know that you are lost without it. Without the Gospel we are all lost – unworthy even to look up at heaven. Knowing his sinfulness, the tax collector trusted solely in God’s grace. He went home justified, right with God, forgiven and redeemed.

What is the Gospel? It is the forgiveness of sins which Christ purchased for you and delivers to you in water and the word, for it is written, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

What is the Gospel? It is the forgiveness of sins that Christ purchased for you and delivers to you in a word from your pastor by Christ’s own command, “Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven.”

What is the Gospel? It is the forgiveness of sins that Christ purchased for you and delivers to you when you eat it and drink it, as Christ invites, “Take eat, this is my body. Take drink, this cup is the new testament in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

What is the Gospel? It is the forgiveness of sins that Christ purchased for you and delivers to you in when you listen and hear it spoken to you in the preached word as Christ commanded, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

What is the Gospel? It is the forgiveness of sins that Jesus purchased with His innocent suffering and death, it is the eternal life which He sealed with His glorious resurrection. The Gospel is not ***about*** forgiveness. The Gospel is Christ delivering to you the forgiveness He purchased for you. And wherever there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

Dearly beloved of God, live in the Gospel. Bask in the glory of the forgiveness Christ purchased and delivers to you for it is yours! It is the merciful gift of your gracious God! It is your confidence unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus! Amen.