

TRUTH

“... Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

September 2024

THE GOSPEL OF GOD

God’s gospel is incredible! It is the most amazing message that human ears can hear and human hearts can contemplate.

In the Bible, “gospel” is translated from the Greek word “εὐαγγέλιον/euangelion,” which “originally denoted a reward for good tidings; later, the idea of reward dropped, and the word stood for ‘the good news’ itself . . . In the NT it denotes the ‘good tidings’ of the kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ” [*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words*; www.studylight.org/dictionaries/ved.html]. The gospel is the great news that salvation is available to mankind through Jesus, the Son of the living God.

In the New Testament, we often read the simple, two-word expression “the gospel” (Mark 1:1,15). It also is called “*the gospel of the kingdom of God*” (Mark 1:14), as well as “*the gospel of peace*” (Ephesians 6:15). Most Christians are familiar with the terminology “*the gospel of Christ*” (Romans 1:16). In particular, the apostle Paul frequently calls it “*the gospel of God*” (1 Thessalonians 2:2,8,9). Though it has several scriptural designations, there is only one true gospel (Galatians 1:6-8). Let us consider some different aspects of God’s gospel and man’s response to it.

Source of the gospel – That would be none other than the Lord Himself. In Paul’s letter to the saints in Thessalonica, he reminded them about the message he had declared to them, five times calling it “the gospel,” “*the gospel of God*,” or “*the gospel of Christ*” (1 Thessalonians 2:2,4,8,9; 3:2). In that context, he said they had received the gospel, “*not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*” (2:13). Yes, the Lord is the Source of the best news ever!

Power of the gospel – “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek*” (Romans 1:16).

Facts of the gospel – “*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:1,3,4).

Warnings of the gospel – “*. . . he who does not believe will be condemned*” (Mark 16:16). “*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).

Promised **blessings** of the gospel – “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*” (Mark 16:16). Jesus is “*the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Hebrews 5:9), and He said that one who keeps His word “*shall never see death*” (John 8:51).

Believe the gospel – While preaching in Galilee, the Christ charged the Jews in that region, “*Repent, and believe the gospel*” (Mark 1:15). As Paul and Silas preached the gospel in Philippi of Macedonia, when a prison-keeper asked about what he must do to be saved, they commanded him, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household*” (Acts 16:10,31).

Obey the gospel – We read the terminology “*obey the gospel*” in three Bible verses: Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, and 1 Peter 4:17. If the gospel can be obeyed, then the gospel contains more than facts. The gospel includes commands which must be obeyed: such commands as believe, repent, and be baptized. To obey the gospel is the same as be “*obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7), obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9), and “*obey the truth*” (1 Peter 1:22).

Proclaim/preach/teach the gospel – Jesus wants His followers to declare the gospel to every person in the whole world (Mark 16:15). Like the apostle Paul, each Christian ought to be ready to declare the gospel’s great message of salvation (Romans 1:15,16).

Defend the gospel – With no intention of boasting about his efforts, Paul reminded the saints in Philippi that he was appointed “*for the defense of the gospel*” (Philippians 1:17). Like our first-century brethren, we need to “*contend earnestly for the faith*” (Jude 3).

Live the gospel – God’s appeal to Jesus’ disciples in Philippi was, “*Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ . . .*” (Philippians 1:27). Yes, we must preach and defend the gospel. As we do those two things, we need to live it, too! Our outreach is strengthened when we teach God’s truth and live it.

-- Roger D. Campbell

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 21-22

Where does the content of these two chapters fit into the overall message of the book of Exodus? What we read in these two sections comes after the Lord spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel (20:3-17) and before Moses went up on top of Sinai for forty days and forty nights (24:18).

By my unofficial count, Exodus chapters twenty-one and twenty-two combined contain more than sixty distinct instructions which Jehovah gave to the Israelites through Moses. The New King James Version, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc., gives this breakdown of these two sections: (1) 21:1-11 – The Law Concerning Servants; (2) 21:12-26 – The Law Concerning Violence; (3) 21:27-36 – Animal Control Laws; (4) 22:1-15 – Responsibility for Property; (5) 22:16-31 – Moral and Ceremonial Principles.

Rather than attempt to cover each of the specific instructions in this passage, we will focus on what we read in one portion — Exodus 22:1-15. We might call this “principles about the property of other people.” The context makes it clear that this message came from God (20:22; 21:1). In addition, it is plain that these guidelines for conduct were not suggestions; rather, they were imperatives. We understand that we are not living under the specific decrees of the law of Moses, but the principles of *fairness* and *justice* which we read in this section are a blessing to any society.

- Not all conduct is acceptable to the Lord. He has high expectations for His people. For instance, thievery (22:1-4) has never met with God’s approval.

- Accountability: if a crime was committed, there would be consequences. Does that idea not make sense for each society in the world?! In Exodus 22, we see that when a crime was committed, there was to be restoration, restitution, payment made, and in general, “make it right.” Punishment of misbehaviour was one way of deterring evil-doing (Deuteronomy 17:6,7).

- Even among God’s people, there can be criminals/wrongdoers. Remember, the law of Moses served not only as a *religious* law, but as a *civil* law, too. The inappropriate actions which are noted in Exodus 22 were those which potentially could take place among the Israelites. We do not broadcast it to the world, but neither do we deny it: there are cases when God’s children sin against each other (Matthew 18:15; 1 Corinthians 6:1,2,6).

- The right to protect one’s property – “*If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed*” (Exodus 22:2). Emotions and feelings do not determine the rightness or wrongness of such action. You might recall that Jesus affirmed, “*But know this, that if the*

master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into” (Matthew 25:43).

- Different crimes received different punishments – That sounds fair and sensible, does it not? In one scenario, if a person stole an animal, he was required to restore four or five animals of the same type (22:1). In a different situation, the thief had to restore only two animals (22:4). Under the old law, *some* crimes warranted the death penalty, but *not all*.

- Restoration of stolen property – “*If the theft is found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double . . . if the thief is found, he shall pay double*” (22:4,7). Repentance requires returning stolen goods, as God declared, “*If the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen . . . he shall surely live . . .*” (Ezekiel 33:15).

- Do not use/take what belongs to someone else without that person’s permission – “*If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man’s field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard*” (22:5). If we apply Jesus’ “Golden Rule,” we will treat other folks’ property like we would like them to treat ours (Luke 6:31).

- Some things happen in life which are out of our control, and we are not held responsible for them – If a man stole another person’s property, the property’s owner was not counted as guilty of wrongdoing (22:7,8). If a vehicle crashes into ours or a medical professional misdiagnoses our health issue . . . Neither of these is our fault, and we should not look at them as a shortcoming on our part or punishment from God.

- A clear system of justice/fairness – For a trespass, or if one claimed that some object was lost, “*the cause of both parties shall come before the judges . . .*” (22:9). The appeal was to hear all parties before making conclusions, and a person’s innocence was presumed until there was evidence that a crime occurred. Love thinks no evil, giving the benefit of the doubt (1 Corinthians 13:4).

- Take good care of borrowed property, treating it as if it were your own (22:10-12). According to Jesus, faithful in little, faithful in much; not dependable in little matters, not dependable in bigger (Luke 16:10).

- There is more to serving the Lord than gathering in a worship assembly – While the law of Moses says a lot about approaching God in worship, what we read in Exodus 22:1-15 deals with everyday life. Man’s duty to God, in addition to worshipping Him, includes treating our fellow man properly. Think about it.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Overcoming Ignorance

Speaking to a lukewarm Christian, a preacher once asked, “Brother _____, do you know what the biggest problem in the Lord’s church is?” The man curtly replied, “I don’t know, and I don’t care,” to which the preacher responded, “That is exactly right!” Indeed, ignorance and apathy might be the biggest problems in the church (and the world, too). This study will focus on overcoming the problem of ignorance.

The most concise definition of ignorance is simply a lack of knowledge. The word could be used of anything (or anyone). One who never keeps up with news or politics, if asked about his/her thoughts on a particular discussion of such, might reply, “I am ignorant of those matters, so I cannot say.” For purposes of this study, we are considering biblical (or spiritual) ignorance. Ignorance of some things is totally benign, being personal preferences and neither bad nor good. But to be biblically ignorant is to err spiritually (Matthew 22:29). When Jesus said, “*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32), He made knowledge of “*truth*” (which is God’s word, John 17:17) mandatory.

Ignorance is a huge problem with huge consequences. The old adage “ignorance is bliss” may be true in some aspects of life, but certainly not in the spiritual realm. Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21-23 show just how serious spiritual ignorance is: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Overcoming ignorance is no secret, and there are no shortcuts: God’s word must be studied regularly and often. Since “*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17), one desiring to grow in faith must be a Bible student. Paul told Timothy to “*be diligent*” in Bible study to be able to divide the word of truth rightly (2 Timothy 2:15). There is no alternative: to overcome biblical ignorance, I must study, study, study God’s word!

In lamenting the lost condition of most of his fleshly brethren, Paul wrote, “*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (Romans 10:1,2). Let us always have a zeal for God, and may that zeal always be guided by knowledge of Scripture.

-- Chad Dollahite

Who is the “David” about whom Ezekiel prophesied?

There are two passages in the book of Ezekiel in which Ezekiel quoted what the Lord said about what someone named “David” would do in the future, that is, after Ezekiel wrote his prophetic message. What do we read about David in those two Bible sections?

“*Therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them . . .*” (Ezekiel 34:22-24).

“*Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them . . . and My servant David shall be their prince forever*” (Ezekiel 37:23-25)

In summary, what truths about David are set forth in those passages? Jehovah indicated that (1) David would be shepherd over God’s flock, (2) David would feed God’s flock, (3) David would be God’s servant, (4) David would be prince forever, and (5) he would be king over God’s people.

Will this be literal David, who ruled over Israel for forty years? No. David died in B.C. 971; Ezekiel began prophesying in about B.C. 595. Thus, David, the biological son of Jesse, was dead at the time Ezekiel gave these prophecies, and he will not be raised from the dead to reign as king. The David about whom Ezekiel prophesied is the Messiah/Christ.

The Messiah would be David’s seed (2 Samuel 7:12). Jesus was (2 Timothy 2:8). The Christ was to sit on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:7). Jesus does that now (Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30,31), ruling as King over His spiritual kingdom (Colossian 1:13). David/the Christ was to be shepherd over God’s one flock (Ezekiel 37:22,23). Jesus is the Good Shepherd over one flock, which is God’s church (John 10:11,16; 1 Peter 5:2)

Why use the name “David” to refer to the Christ? As we noted, the Messiah would be David’s seed/offspring. The Christ also would have some of the same characteristics David had. David ruled over literal Israel; the Christ reigns over spiritual Israel. In the Bible, we see Jerusalem called “Sodom” (Isaiah 1:10), John the Baptizer is called “Elijah” (Malachi 4:5), and Assyria is described as “Egypt” (Hosea 9:3). Thus, it is not surprising to see Jesus called “David.”

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE PARABLE OF THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

The parables of Jesus are among the most beloved of all the teachings of the Bible. Distinctive in approach, these commonplace and colorful stories were effective because they coupled the everyday experiences of people with conclusions that brought the messages home powerfully. The definition of the word “parable” is “to lay alongside of.” Thus, Jesus’ parables take real-life situations and place spiritual lessons alongside of them.

Luke, by inspiration, makes it a point that Jesus was a man of prayer. If we go back to chapter 3 of Luke’s gospel, we find Jesus praying at His baptism. Then, in Luke 5, Jesus was praying as the crowds increased. In chapter 6, Jesus prayed before He chose the twelve. When we come to chapter 9, Jesus was praying before He asked the twelve who they thought He was. Again, in chapter 9, He prayed at His transfiguration. In Luke 22, Jesus prayed on the night of His betrayal. Even as He spent much time traveling, teaching, serving, healing, feeding, eating, sleeping, etc., He did not fail to withdraw from His busy life and spend time alone with His Father. This is the setting of His teaching in Luke 11: “*Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples’*” (Luke 11:1). We do not know which of the disciples asked this of Jesus, but Jesus took the occasion to instruct them.

Luke records the Lord’s teaching prayer in shorter form than Matthew. Then, at the end of the prayer, He does not follow with the instruction that we ought to forgive one another, but rather with this parable:

“And He said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?’ I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your

children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:5-13).

There are several things we can learn about our approach to our Father from this parable of friends seeking and meeting needs.

We learn about the importance of relationship. When we approach our heavenly Father, we are coming to a Friend! Anyone who is a sinner is an enemy of God (Romans 5:6-10). Through the blood of Jesus, we have been reconciled, that is, made friendly with God (Romans 5:10-11; Colossians 1:19-23). As the children of God, we are able to approach Him as our Father.

We also learn the greatness of our needs. There are daily necessities that concern us (Luke 11:3), while there are much greater needs to be met (Luke-11:4)! We should appreciate that all of God’s provisions sustain us – physically and spiritually. Thus, we must see our lack and turn to the One Who has all resources at His disposal.

Jesus taught the benefit of persistence. The neighbor did not help simply because of the need at hand, but because of the *persistence* (shamelessness, importunity, impudence). In our prayers, we must be willing to continue to make request. The verb tense of “*ask...seek...knock*” (Luke 11:9) gives the meaning “to keep on; to be persistent.” Remember Abraham’s persistence with God regarding the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18), as well as the Syro-Phoenician woman who came to Jesus (Matthew 15:22-28). We must keep coming to God in prayerful request.

We learn about the reward that comes to the one in need who persists in making request to a friend. In the parable, the friend goes to his neighbor asking for three loaves. When his request is granted, it is granted abundantly: “*he will rise and give him as many as he needs*” (Luke 11:8).

Our Father will reward our requests in meeting our needs. He, as a loving Father, wants to give to His children. And, when He gives, He will give what we need! We should not be negligent or afraid to ask. If persistence with a friend brings fruitfulness, how much more will our persistence bring fruit from our heavenly Father?

-- Dave Leonard

[Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in all articles of *TRUTH* come from the New King James Version; ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.]

TRUTH is published each month in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God.