

What Do We Mean by the Gospel?

You cannot have been around our worship services at Trinity or at a small group for long before you hear the term “gospel”. What exactly do we mean by that? First, the term *gospel* means *good news*, the declaration of God that He will not count our sins against us if we trust in His Son, Jesus, to be our God and Savior. At the same time, however, trusting Christ is not merely some switch we flip and now we’re going to heaven. The gospel of grace (*God’s work on our behalf*) is how we *grow* as Christians. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian church, “*As you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in Him,*” Colossians 2:6.

So, how well do you know *the gospel*? How easily can you rehearse to yourself or a friend what God has done? Let me suggest a few essential points:

Creation

GOD IS HOLY – HE IS INCOMPARABLE, IRREPLACEABLE, ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY

As the Bible reveals God and His nature, first we see that He is the Creator of all existence, and *He alone is uncreated – no one and no thing compares with Him in this*. God is perfect, without any equal, rival, or peer so nothing is good apart from Him. As the LORD, Almighty, He cannot be removed by anyone or anything, and no life can be sustained on its own without Him.

HE DESIGNED US TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF HIS HOLINESS

God created us in His image – He owns us and designed us to live connected to Him and to reflect His character. He defines morality. As the LORD is the highest good, we are to seek Him and enjoy Him as our greatest treasure. He is absolutely essential and we were built to need Him. As God is in His character, we are to be also as His representatives; as He is generous or loving, we should be too.

The Fall

FALLEN, ALL WE DO IS TRY TO REPLACE HIM

Humankind is sinful in that we have rebelled against God’s design. The essence of sin is not mere behavior, but an underlying attitude that pervades all kinds of behavior. For instance, lying, murder, theft, sexual sin, and envy are different surface expressions of the same desire underneath – the desire to be one’s own god and avoid the true God.

AS A RESULT OF OUR SIN WE ARE GUILTY AND RUINED

We have asserted ourselves as our own god and we have tenaciously sought to live without Him and the consequences are devastating. The consequences are twofold: first, we are damaged (any time you violate a design it causes damage) so that we do not function as God designed (which means that sin, evil, broken relationships and tragedy in the world are *our* fault, not God’s). Second, we are guilty – in God’s court we are indicted, tried, and found guilty of treason against Him. We have attempted to replace the true King of the Universe (*a divine coup attempt*) and God’s just sentence is death and hell.

WE ARE HELPLESS TO CHANGE OUR CONDITION

The Bible is clear that sin and its consequences have left us unable to fix ourselves. This tendency to fight against God's irreplaceable role in our lives, and the horrible consequences we have caused are so overwhelming that the Bible describes us as *dead in our sin, slaves to sin, dominated by evil, or enemies of God* because of our sinful behavior. So, we need a Savior...

Redemption

GOD CAME TO EARTH IN CHRIST TO CHANGE WHAT WE COULD NOT CHANGE

Jesus is God who came to earth. It is clear in the Bible that God so loved the world, that even in the midst of our attempts to replace Him, He knew that we could not stop the madness of our self-destructive efforts to be rid of Him and His role in our lives. So, in order to save us, even though we do not deserve it, *in Christ, God did what no man could do, repairing the damage of our sin and taking away our guilt through his life, death, and resurrection.* Being fully human, Jesus can stand in our place in God's court, and yet being fully God Jesus has the power and authority to make His work apply to people throughout every time or culture.

JESUS SATISFIED JUSTICE BY TAKING THE PUNISHMENT ONLY WE DESERVE

Jesus solves the problem of our guilt. In Christ, God Himself came as a Substitute for all those who would believe in Him, first by dying the death we deserve to die. As we sinned by attempting to take God's place as our own gods, in His crucifixion Jesus took our place; He was treated as we deserve for our record so that our guilt could be justly removed.

JESUS FULFILLED GOD'S DESIGN BY NEVER TRYING TO REPLACE HIS FATHER

Jesus solves the problem of death and ruin. Where we are wrecked because we violated God's design, in Jesus' sinless life there was no damage because He never tried to – it was in perfect keeping with God's design for our first father, Adam. *There is no deadness in Jesus* and His resurrection is evidence of what Jesus deserves for His record as well as proof of His power to make these things real in our lives.

But how can someone actually experience what Jesus came to accomplish? How can someone actually come to know Him personally? This is not merely an intellectual exercise; rather *we must respond to Jesus Christ by turning away from being our own god and trusting Him personally to be our God and Savior.*

Repentance and Faith

WE MUST TURN AWAY FROM BEING OUR OWN GOD

Jesus said, "Repent and believe the gospel!" While we know of un-kept promises to do better, to repent is something much deeper. To repent is to turn the opposite direction from where you have been headed. To repent is to joyfully turn away from every competing allegiance! To repent is also to own the truth – to acknowledge that you are helpless against the problem of your sin and that you cannot fix yourself.

WE MUST TRUST THAT ONLY JESUS CAN RESTORE US TO HIMSELF

To believe is to trust. To believe in Jesus in a very important sense is to come full circle – we trust that Jesus is irreplaceable. The Bible teaches us that no one else can give us life and that no one else can save us from the destruction we deserve. In other words, the Bible teaches us that *Jesus is holy* and that we should treat Him that way. We should treat Him as if no one else and no thing can compare with Him and what He promises to do for the person who trusts in Him as their God and Savior.

An analogy I have considered is how I take my car to a mechanic for repairs. Repentance is the implicit acknowledgement I make that I cannot repair my car myself – my car is broken and I need help. Belief is what happens when I hand my keys to the mechanic – I trust him to literally do what I cannot do. That is the essence of what trusting Jesus Christ is – it is depending upon Jesus to do what I cannot do.

So What?

This is only the beginning... To turn away from being your own god and trust Jesus to be God and Savior is a change for eternity. But on this earth, it is only the beginning of a life-long (yet eternal) relationship with Him. By causing believers to be born of His Spirit, Jesus begins the process of repairing the cause of our damaged lives. Jesus changes what we cannot change by working into us a new disposition toward His Father. Jesus gives us a new heart by His Spirit so that instead of stubbornly trying to replace His Father, we begin to love, treasure, and honor Him as we should.

He has given us the Bible so that we can know Him, and continue to grow in our understanding of Him and His design for our lives. He has given us the privilege of talking with Him and seeking Him in prayer. He has given us the privilege of access to Him as His own children. He has not left alone either; He has given us a place with His people (the Church) so that we can be taught, be encouraged, and be trained for our role in His world and in His kingdom.

Hopefully this kind of an outline will help you to clarify what the gospel is. Note that there are a hundred issues not addressed! There's nothing here about baptism, standards of morality, denominations, or so much of what our culture immediately thinks of as "Christianity." What I would underscore is that if your experience of Christianity does not start, follow, and end with the gospel, then it may *not* be Christianity at all. It possibly could be a man-made religion that will do nothing in the end to remedy your guilt or damaged life.

If, however your hope is solely in Christ, built upon what He alone has done, it does have unmistakable effects. The Bible teaches you that a real faith in Jesus will be proven in a changed life. First, you will no longer wonder about God's character; you will know Him. Also, you will be moved to love Jesus, just as He taught that those who have been forgiven little love little, but those who have been forgiven much love much. And He will more and more become your greatest Treasure and joy; He will be your delight, your *inheritance* as the Bible puts it, the very reason you want to live. In other words, we get back to where this all started – you now can see that God truly is holy, that He is irreplaceable. No one and no thing can possibly compare with Him.