

SOME GOOD NEWS FOR TRYING TIMES

Romans 3:21-25

Introduction: If you were given 60 seconds, could you explain the gospel? How about 3 minutes? 30 minutes? What if your family or co-workers gave you an hour to explain "good news"? Where would you start? What would you make sure someone knew in order to understand what they needed to do to be saved?

The gospel is the **fundamental truth and reality** of our relationship with God, our hope for the future, and what radically shapes our life in the present. In other words, there is no redemption, no hope, no worship, no reconciliation, no church, no relationship with God without the gospel! It is our **glue and oil**, what keeps us together and moves us forward. However, we often have a hard time clarifying or explaining it succinctly, completely, or without over-simplifying it. We hear the word often (I hope), believe the message, and revel in its effects in our lives, but sometimes get caught explaining the good news of the gospel like a mechanic trying to explain how an engine in a car works: either using big words that no one understands or like I do - put gas in, turn the key, and it goes. Neither explanation is helpful, and leaves the recipient confused or feeling a deep sense of being condescended to.

There are reasons why we struggle with this:

1) **The message itself is foolishness** - Paul said that the "*word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing*" (1 Cor. 1:18) and "*we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles.*" (1 Cor. 1:23). People blinded by their sin *cannot* understand until God opens their eyes by His grace, so they will NOT take kindly to a message of a crucified and risen Jesus. On top of that, the gospel is **offensive**, telling someone they are **sinners under the wrath of God, deserving judgment** is NOT a great marketing meme. This is why when Paul called for **repentance and a risen Savior** on Mars Hill in Acts 17:22-34, some **mocked him**, some **wanted to hear more**, and some **joined and believed**.

2) **We are insecure and feel inadequate** - We are in good company. Remember Moses fought God's call to be His mouthpiece with Egypt, claiming multiple reasons why God had the wrong man: **no one will believe me** (Exodus 4:1), **I'm not good with the words** (Exodus 4:10), and **could you just please send someone else??!!!** (Exodus 4:13). This is why we are reminded that we have been **made adequate** by God as ministers of a new covenant through the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4-6)

3) **We lose muscle memory and get gospel atrophy** - I played basketball with my 3 teenage nephews this last week in Ohio. I have the muscle memory of shooting and dribbling, which enables me to participate. But I am clearly atrophied when it came to actually *making* the shots outside that I took, mostly because my muscles themselves have atrophied over the years, forcing me to use my size and words as an advantage instead. When we **stop reviewing the gospel** in our own lives and go weeks/months/years without speaking it to others, we lose our edge and crispness. Remember, the gospel IS the story of redemption that the WHOLE Scripture is based on, so when we are out of communion with God's Word, we talk of the gospel as something **past in our lives**, not something that drives us. I talked for 45 minutes the other day with a man at the gas station, and was blown away at how he wanted to tell me his story of his music and song writing. It was his passion, his love, his life, and he willingly talked to stranger about it in detail. As I listened and waited for an opportunity to share our hope in Jesus, I was convicted that I often don't have the same impetus as this man to talk about Jesus with others.

So for the rest of the summer and into the Fall, we are going to be unpacking the complexity of the gospel in digestible chunks. We will be offering resources, definitions, and opportunities to understand key passages that every believer should have underlined in their Bible and life. This study is timely for several reasons:

- **Every generation needs to fight for gospel clarity** - If October 31, 1517 taught us anything, it's the fact that it is far too easy to keep religion and lose the gospel. Martin Luther fought for the authority of Scripture over the church and its human leaders, and for salvation by faith alone apart from contributing works from mankind. This Reformation reminds us that we always need *reforming*. A gospel of faith alone is completely antithetical to our natural drift, and will always be less popular than man-centered religion. If our goal was to produce numbers, we'd simply have a mantra of "give the people what they want!", not "lovingly give them what they need". The fight for a clear gospel is the fight for life and love.
- **Clarity of terms is essential** - The gospel is **simple but NOT simplistic**. It can be understood by a child yet confounds the PhD. Words matter and are vitally important. Words like "love" have to get clarified over time or it denigrates into a feeling based, self-focused exercise that covers any kind of selfish behavior instead of a volitional, choice based action taken that is selfless, sacrificial, and serves. The same with the gospel. The term can lose its umph and power when everything is "gospel". If everything is "gospel", then nothing is. There are also a thousand ways to explain the gospel, but IF IT IS MISSING COMPONENTS, it is NOT a true and real message.
- **Good News is the Need of the Moment** - The gospel is where **hope is found in the midst of fear**. The gospel is **where reconciliation between ethnicities is found**. The gospel is the foundation of **making disciples**, which is the mission of the church. The gospel is what changes people from the inside out, what makes dead men alive, what transfers people from darkness to light, what redeems to harshest of circumstances and forgives the most vile sin. The good news of the gospel is why we **PRAY ---- PLAN ---- RISK**. It is certainly worth living for, and freeing us to die for.
- **We are all messed up at some level** - One of the things that has been revealed in my mind and heart over the last weeks/months is that we are all messed up more than we like to admit, both individually and in our families. We struggle with guilt and shame of the past, pressure and responsibilities of the present, and fear and anxiety of the future. On top of this, most of us **refuse to talk about or admit** that we have problems, solidifying the things that need to change.

The gospel is needed as much for believers as for unbelievers

We need the good news of Jesus **every day**, since we battle with our sin every day. We need to wrestle with our deep need of a Savior and our consistent refusal to yield to our Lord. We need reminders that God started a good work in us and will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6)

- **We exist to worship, worship exists because of the gospel** - We were created to worship God as our Creator and God, the glorious One of the universe. Sin separated, both in a transactional and also a fundamental way. We not only could not worship, but did not want to. The gospel

not only gives us the opportunity to worship God, but also changes our posture toward God, desiring to glorify Him in **ALL AREAS OF LIFE**, worshipping Him in our home, community, work, and church. The gospel moves us from superficial, "me-centered", shallow, showy, and man pleasing worship to Scripture saturated, Christ exalting, God glorifying, Spirit dependant, humble and selfless worship.

So we will work through **4 main themes** over the next weeks: God, mankind, Christ, and our response to the reality of who each person is and what each did. This morning I want to give us an example, an outline, a template for what this looks like so that we can gain clarity, confidence, and boldness in our life, home, and interaction with others.

*"But now the **righteousness of God** has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it --- the **righteousness of God** through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.
For there is no distinction.
For **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
This was to show **God's righteousness**, because in his divine forbearance he has passed over former sins."
Romans 3:21-25*

Perfection of God

The gospel starts and ends with God. It is about Him because ALL of life and the universe itself was created by Him and for Him. The heavens themselves **declare the glory of God** (Ps. 19:1) because that is exactly what they were created to do. God is **holy**, which means He is completely different than us, untainted by sin. Separated from mankind as Creator, yet He made Himself plainly known to us through the work of His creation. We perceive and are privy to his invisible attributes, namely His **eternal power and divine nature** (Rom. 1:20). He created mankind in His image to know Him, worship Him, and be in a relationship with Him. The demands of His holy and righteous nature were the perfection of His creation, meaning that sin not only separated from relationship but also demanded His wrath poured out on sin itself (Rom. 1:18).

God's righteousness demands payment for sin. He cannot wave a magic wand and forgive the offense done to Him or He we would cease to be righteous. **His holiness demanded payment, and His love offered the way.** Notice that in Romans 3, God's righteousness is seen by upholding His holy, set apartness, but also His willingness to redeem those who violated His righteousness. The answer was not the Law, but Jesus Christ.

Plight of Mankind

The first three chapters of Romans argue for one overarching issue: **all of mankind is declared guilty for their sin**, regardless of whether they are those who had and tried to keep the Law or those that only had the law written in their hearts (Rom. 2:15). The whole world is "**held accountable to God**" (Rom. 3:19), meaning everyone must account for their sinful actions, attitudes, and nature. Notice three distinct areas of the plight of mankind this section gives us:

1) **Definition of sin** - Sin means "missing the mark", failing to obey God. But it goes deeper than that. It is a deep seated refusal to honor Him as righteous and holy, rebelling against His design and order, and replacing His rule with our own (Rom. 1:18-32). The summary statement: *sin is falling short of the glory of God*. When we fail to give Him glory in ANY area of life, we sin. When we fail to believe His promises, walk by faith, or refuse to acknowledge His rule, we sin.

2) **The Law Cannot Save** - The Law of God cannot save (Rom. 3:20), because the debt is too great. Any and every effort by man to save himself through his good works fall short of the standard God has set: perfection. What good is the Law? It brings the knowledge of sin which drives us back, in desperate dependency, to the work of Jesus. Every religion, I mean every religion (even those that don't think they are a religion) comes from a foundation of human effort to be reconciled with whatever God or savior they believe in. But no amount of obedience can counteract the nature of our sin and offense to a holy God.

3) **All have sinned, all are condemned** - You may say, "wait, we aren't as bad as _____?!!!" They deserve it, we don't!" Its true that not everyone has sinned to the same level or the same amount, but all stand condemned. It'd be like if all the world stood at the edge of the *Grand Canyon* to jump across, and some claimed that they could jump **further than others** (I'm better than you....I can jump further). But in the end, all jump, all land in the bottom, all die. Landing further in the canyon does not bring more life than crashing on the rocks at the base.

Person and Work of Jesus Christ

How does God save sinful, condemned people without compromising His holiness and righteousness? This is the question **Job asked** way back in the beginning of time, in Job 9:2, "*Truly I know that it is so: But how can a man be in the right before God?*" This is THE question of the universe for all time. The answer is as simple as it is resounding: **The person and work of Jesus Christ!**

1) **The Expression of Righteousness and Love** - The Law only condemns and cannot save, so God had to provide another way. We cannot save ourselves, we cannot look within and find salvation, but must have something OUTSIDE of ourselves. Only a LOVING, MERCIFUL, and GRACIOUS God would provide a way to bring sinful humanity, who were by nature **rebels, enemies, and self-worshippers**, to Himself THROUGH HIMSELF. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). That is mega love. That leaves everyone here knowing without a shadow of a doubt that God is not only holy, just, and righteous, but the epitome of love.

2) **The Just & Justifier** - The answer to the cosmic question is found in the complex simplicity of Jesus Christ. He is both the JUST and the JUSTIFIER! He was the perfect sacrifice needed so that God could have satisfaction for sin (the propitiation) and **buy back or redeem** His own through His blood. God never compromised His holiness, but upheld it in Christ and imputed righteousness to lowly sinners to reconcile them to Himself. This is how God could **pass over** sins, forgiving them, since He was satisfied with the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Power given to Respond

Notice that the emphasis of the response of sinners is clear: we must have **faith**: We believe in the work of Jesus on our behalf. We receive forgiveness and redemption as a **gift of grace**, something given and

NOT earned. We bank our life completely on the finished work of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our standing with God. This faith leads to redemption which allows us to once again glorify God in worship. This faith is NOT merely a mental ascent but an entrusting of our life to, turning from our sin and former life, recognizing the righteousness of God, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the freedom to obey God's commands, not to earn but to please, not to make ourselves acceptable but reflect the fact that we have been made acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

That is the gospel, the good news of reconciliation between sinful man and righteous God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, received by faith alone. Does this message excite you? Bore you? Cause indifference in you? Your response will be telling of your relationship with God Himself.

At the end of each week I want to challenge us to try to memorize (not rigidly) the gospel in one minute. This comes from Mark Dever in his book "The Gospel and Personal Evangelism", and something he challenged every member of his church to memorize, or at least say similarly together. So read along with me:

"The good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into new life, and eternal life with God."

Digging Deeper for Further Reading:

"*What is the Gospel*" by Greg Gilbert is an excellent, short, concise treatment of this four part explanation of the gospel. It is only 120 pages, which means it won't take long to go through.

Digging Deeper in Personal Evaluation:

- How would you explain the gospel to others if you had 1, 3, or 30 minutes?
- What hinders you from sharing the gospel with others?
- How does the gospel affect your life each day? How does the truth of the gospel change the way you approach worship?