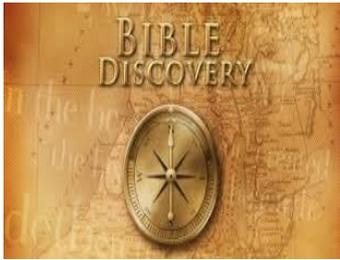


Where to Begin



Today we're not only starting a new chapter in the life of *Mt Brydges Baptist Church*, meeting in the afternoon rather than Sunday mornings, continuing to explore God's will for our corporate lives, but we're also starting a new series entitled, *Gospel 101*. In this series, we'll examine what the Gospel is – what we believe and why we preach what we preach. I can think of nothing more important for a local church than for us to study through Scripture regarding the Gospel. In an age where the Gospel is becoming increasingly unpopular, where the gospel is being twisted and ignored, where mankind "no longer put up with sound doctrine..." where mankind "...gather around them a great number of teacher to say what their itching ears want to hear" [2 Timothy 4:3]; it becomes even more important. So then, how would you answer the question, "What's the most important thing about the church?" Even more particularly, what is the Church?

Let me suggest to you that if we would master the basics for our Christian life and Godliness, it won't be through children's ministry or missions or our style of worship or even how we receive the gifts of the Spirit as important as all those are. We tend to think of these things when asked the question of what is most important in the local church because we're focused on what a church *does* rather than what a church *is* or what she *believes*. We forget the church is God's people – a people who, often at the cost of their own grief, assume all agree on what the Gospel is so concentration is put on being busy doing saintly, gospel-like things to indicate they're believers, living the "good and narrow way". But how can we know we agree on what we believe unless we're willing to examine, up close and intimately what it is we believe? What can we do that's important as the church to and for the Kingdom of God unless first we're immersed in, and committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? So in this series, I'm going to explain the main contours of the Gospel as I understand it within Scripture. I'm really seeking to answer only one question, "*What is the Gospel?*" You might be thinking, "Isn't that simple? We all know what the Gospel is, don't we? Yet think about what comes to mind when people hear the word "Gospel". For some it's a type of music; for others it refers to the first four books of NT - *the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* - for others it encompasses the ethical teachings of Jesus. Yet listen to how Paul sites the life-changing essentials of the gospel in his letter to the Corinthians as he declares it's...

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- 1) The physical sacrifice for our sins and resurrection of Jesus all in accordance with the prophecy of God's Word; and**
- 2) The account of eye-witnesses who bear testimony to what they'd seen – many who were still living at the time of Paul's writing and therefore there was no way he could be lying.**

This was the crux of the gospel for the Apostle Paul. Yet today, many call themselves God's people – from many religions - while remaining tossed about by condemnation and guilt; they've not found release from the agony of their past, they've not been nourished by the hope of an eternity with their heavenly Father, nor have they found joy and love in their current lives all found solely by knowing the peace and power of the Gospel! They mouth all the right words, show all the right actions, but the proof of the pudding in their daily lives demonstrates they're missing the wonderful Good News which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's because they've grown up with an errant view of Christianity – a watered-down, non-biblical, anemic distortion of what God has given to them. I'll never forget the years I spent growing up in church without the knowledge I needed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that I needed to confess my sin and surrender my life to Him, allowing Jesus to have the throne of my heart. In the church our family attended, I heard plenty

about being a good person, about doing well to others and not doing bad things. But I never heard that with man it's impossible, that only through salvation in Jesus, God's Son as my Saviour, is it possible. My Christian life was only as good as my present performance level at any given time. Thank God when I was twenty I heard the Good News of the Gospel and I was saved! I believe Satan loved those years of self-defamation just as He

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loves those who week by week come to an altar or a confessionary, confess their sin, receive "forgiveness", pay their penitence, and then go out and do it all again until next week. Satan delights in anything except in people believing and applying biblical Gospel to their lives. That's why this summer I intent to preach and teach the Biblical Gospel founded on the gift of God's grace, shown through the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus our Saviour, and imparted by God's Holy Spirit that convicts and teaches and directs.

Listen again to the words we heard from our scripture reading, "*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance*" [vs. 3]. Why does Paul call it of 'first importance'? I found this definition of the word *importance*: "*the state or fact of being of great significance or value*". With its great value, Paul stresses the gospel is central to the doctrines, the precepts and the principals by which we live our daily lives. Do we treasure the Gospel as being of such great value to us? Do we look to the Gospel of God to set the course of our day, to show us the way to interact with others, to give us joy, hope and love in all things? Do we look to Christ pre-eminently as our Lord and Saviour?

Unfortunately, I think, in this modern important - even those things within our music we sing, the way we dress, fellowship – and can't forget our pet long after significance's been lost; held Everyone through this series, to ask one BIG question: Is the Gospel of first importance to me? In other words, am I seeking above everything else to know and understand and grow in my understanding of the Gospel?" If you don't make it of first importance you won't just drift into it. In today's world you can be sure you won't just drift into it because the culture and the world are opposed to the Gospel. That's why the early church was so persecuted because they stuck to the Gospel and wouldn't move off from it. So why did Paul have to remind them of its importance? Let's consider the reasons Paul gives to encourage the Corinthians (and us as well) to be reminded of the Gospel...

Is the Gospel of first importance to me?

era, we've made other things more such as church - our experiences - the type of stand whether we stand or sit, our wonderful doctrines – interpreted and on to alongside *our* their good deeds. I want

- 1) *As believers in Jesus Christ we must not drift from the Gospel.*** Do you see how we so easily drift from the Gospel? If you confess sin before God to receive His forgiveness. And then you feel like really need to work hard before you can be restored to God, spending weeks, sometimes months or years, working to secure forgiveness, or we say things like, "*I know God has forgiven me but I just can't forgive myself*" then the problem is not we haven't learnt how to forgive ourselves; the problem is, we've failed to believe the Gospel. We negate what God did for us in Christ and begin to focus on what we must do to be saved. The writer of Hebrews says, "*Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it*" [Hebrews 2:1]. He uses a nautical term of a boat that is not anchored down and begins to drift away. We have to ensure we're anchored to the Gospel at all times.
- 2) *As believers in Jesus Christ the Gospel must be the good news not good advice and it must be preached.*** Peter understood this at Cornelius' home sharing the gospel to him and his family: "*You know the message of God sent to the people of Israel, tell the Good News of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*" [Acts 10:36] Why was it preached? Because the gospel which was passed on was the gospel of salvation – Paul wrote, "*I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved...*" To Timothy, Paul instructed, "*Preach the Word! Be prepared in season and out of season...*" [2 Timothy 4:2] Peter insisted, "*Be prepared to answer everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...*" [1 Peter 3:15] Look at what we

in ministry dish out today - 4 steps to a happy life, 6 steps to a better life, how to be happy, get more... the list goes on. There's plenty of good advice in the world, what's really needed is **God's Good News!** We've the privilege to share it with all we meet. That's what preaching is! All other religions give advice; they drive everything you're doing in fear. Only Christ brings good news founded on love so great that He gave his life that we might have an abundant life in Him.

- 3) ***As believers in Jesus Christ the Gospel must be received.*** I sort of touched on this in my previous point but let me expand on it. It isn't enough to just *admire the gospel* – you have to have it. Many have read the Bible; it's even a course in university philosophy. But to be real, the gospel's an event which has to have occurred in us. Like the saying says, "There are no grandkids in heaven!" I like the story of the teacher who asks little Johnny, "You have \$2 and your dad gives you \$10, now how much money do you have?" Johnny replies, "\$2". The teacher repeats herself since Johnny seems not to understand the question. Still Johnny answers, "\$2". This time, exasperated, the teacher tells him, "You obviously don't understand the question!" Johnny then explains, "No, teacher, you don't understand my dad – there's no way he's giving me \$10!" We've each got to have it for ourselves, nobody else can do it for us and we can't get in on abstract knowledge. Salvation's no good to us in someone else's pocket. It must become *personal*. I have to repent and receive the Gospel and put my trust in it. There has to be a moment when each of us surrenders. Have you received the Gospel? Do you trust in it *alone* to save you? Unlike Johnny's dad, our Heavenly Father has a gift worth far more than ten dollars and He's ready to give it to us and change our lives forever if we're willing to receive it through His Son Jesus Christ.
- 4) ***As believers in Jesus Christ the Gospel compels us to take our Stand.*** Our entire standing before God is based on the Gospel. Whether we're *Standing on the Promises*, or we *Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus as soldiers of the cross*, we take our stand with Christ. We must be ready to fight for the Gospel. When we fail to stand on the Gospel we begin to seek from people what can only be found in the Gospel. For instance, Rachel in the Old Testament says to Jacob, "*Give me children or else I die*". She's saying "I can't live unless I have children (saying God's not enough; only children can give me happiness). "Standing on the Gospel" means I'm content with constantly applying God in my life. Paul writes later in this letter "*Stand firm; let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*" [1 Corinthians 15:58]
- 5) ***As believers in Jesus Christ we must Hold On as we move forward.*** In an age when action is glorified, it's hard to accept the command to "hold on", to do nothing, but let God have control, to hold firmly to the word preached to us and to follow it. Oh that we would hold on tight as we move forward for Jesus! When preschoolers go walking, you see them with their caregiver and all of them are holding on to a rope so they stay together. Oh that we would learn to hold on in our walk with the Lord!

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From all we've heard today, we learn the Gospel saved us, keeps us, and guarantees our future with our Heavenly Father. To know this is to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But to know any gospel without the cross, to have any gospel without the death and resurrection of Jesus, is no Gospel at all. Paul says Jesus died for our sins *according to the Scriptures* with redemption through Jesus. The Bible reminds us that on our own, we're slaves to sin; we can't find peace with God. Through the cross, however, all these limitations have been lifted – lifted up in Christ! Through the cross, life triumphs over death! Through the cross, the Christian is set free from the bondage of sin! Through the cross, we're made righteous in Christ! If you've never considered your life must be *cross-centered* in order to be *Gospel-focused*, then consider what arises from **not** being cross-centered: you often lack joy and compassion for others; you lack consistent spiritual growth feeding from the meat of God's Word; you lack passion, energy and direction for God; and

you're always looking for some new technique, some new "truth" or "experience" to bring energy to your faith yet you're never satisfied.

So then, as we consider what has been presented, the question is – "Is this truth - Jesus' love - more real to you than ever before?" I pray that through this series, Jesus touches your hearts with a yearning you've never experienced before and that you receive a fresh infilling of God's Holy Spirit equipping you with a new understanding, a new love, a new joy only available in Jesus Christ as your Saviour. The power of the Gospel in the first century was the announcement that Jesus was alive! That Jesus was alive; seen by many witnesses 2,000 years ago sent from the Father is great; that Jesus is alive for evermore and lives within my heart – your heart – now ***that's the gospel!*** Paul says, "*If there is no resurrection than Christ is not raised and if Christ is not raised then you are still in your sins*". [1 Corinthians 15:17]

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That's just how important all this is!

Nothing is as essential to our lives as to have a firm relationship with Jesus Christ allowing the Gospel to have its way in our hearts. If what you have read has touched your heart, then I encourage you to make a personal relationship with Jesus your testimony today. If we can help you with that decision, give us a call or contact us.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave