

“The Beginning Of The Gospel”

July 21, 2019

Mark 1:1-15

SI: This morning I’m starting a short sermon series that will take us through the rest of the summer. Let me read the Scripture passage, then I’ll tell you what the sermon series will be about.

INTRO: I have some good news. We’re having a baby!

Have you ever heard someone say something like that. Of course you have.

And your ears perk up, don’t they, when somebody says they have good news?

Have you heard the good news? We won! We’re going to the state championship!

Good news. All the charges were dismissed.

Good news. Your biopsy came back negative.

Good news. Everybody will be home for Christmas.

The theme of my sermon series is the Gospel.

Hard to imagine a more important subject. The heart of the Christian faith.

In a sense the Gospel is simple. Even a child can hear it and believe.

And yet, when you look at the various ways the Bible itself presents the Gospel and even how it uses the term Gospel, you realize it’s also complex.

So over these weeks I’m going to look at several well-known passages and all together they will paint for us a picture of the Gospel.

I’m sure all of you know that the word Gospel means good news.

In the NT it’s the Greek word euangelion. Prefix eu good, angelion news.

In the OT there are a number of places where this terminology is also used.

When Absalom’s rebellion was crushed, David’s general Joab sent a runner from the battlefield who came to King David and said:

“Good news for my lord the king! For Yahweh has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

But the most famous Old Testament passages that mention good news are those that prophecy the coming of the Messiah, especially those in Isaiah. Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

Remember Jesus Christ himself read that verse in his hometown synagogue, in Nazareth, at the beginning of his public ministry.

And after he read it he began his sermon by saying:

Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!

Jesus not only proclaimed the good news, he is the good news.

The English word “Gospel” has an interesting origin.

Back in old days the word “good” was spelled with one “o” g-o-d, just like God.

And in Old English the word “spel” meant tale or report.

So the NT Greek word was translated as two Old English words god spel.

As English evolved those two words became one “godspel” and then the “d” was dropped and it became the modern English word Gospel.

The word Gospel today may have different connotations, but its original meaning, is simply good news.

So every place your New Testament says Gospel, you could accurately substitute the phrase good news. And some versions of the Bible do that.

Now, let’s just pause here at the beginning of this sermon series for a moment and ponder something extraordinary.

All the great world religions claim to be true, but none of them proclaim their truth as good news for all the world to hear.

All the great philosophical systems claim to be true, but none of them proclaim their truth as good news to lift the hearts of broken-hearted people.

Good news is unique to the Christian faith.

Good news about the meaning of your life. Good news about your moral failure.

Good news about your inevitable death. Good news about the final judgment.

The Gospel is good news about all the biggest concerns of human life.

So what is the good news? As I said, we’re going to look at a number of Scripture passages that will give us the big picture, but we have to start somewhere.

We’re starting with this Mark passage because it lays a foundation by presenting two ways to view the Gospel.

1. The Gospel is the whole story of God’s redemption of this fallen world
2. The Gospel is the specific proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ

Credit where credit is due. A series of sermons by Dr. Robert Rayburn

MP#1 The Gospel is the whole story of God’s redemption of this fallen world

If I asked you to summarize the Gospel in a few sentences, what would you say?
Probably something about Jesus dying on the cross for your sins or how you can have eternal life if you believe in Christ.
And that would certainly be correct.

But look at Mark's opening words:

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
In other words, Mark is saying that this opening paragraph is the introduction of the Gospel and the rest of his book tells the rest of the Gospel.
So he sees his whole book as the Gospel.

From the earliest days of the church the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John weren't called histories or biographies—they were called Gospels.
The Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark, Luke, John.
Those were the titles given to them because the church recognized that everything in these four books is part of the Gospel.
Not just some things in them, everything.

Jesus himself made the same point about the Old Testament Scriptures.
He said that the Gospel he was proclaiming was first proclaimed by Moses and the prophets. Jesus made this point over and over about the Old Testament.
The Hebrew Scriptures are the good news that is being fulfilled through me.
The Apostle Paul referred to his teaching and his letters as the Gospel.
So it would be correct to say that everything in the Bible is part of the Gospel.

Getting back to the Gospels themselves—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—when you think about what they tell us, it's a lot more than just the message of God's grace and Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.
Mark says the Gospel starts with the ministry of John the Baptist.
John's message warned of judgment and said salvation required repentance.
Then Jesus himself follows John and he also says: Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. So these calls to repentance are part of the Gospel.

Jesus speaks frequently about judgment and wrath of God coming on unbelievers, and how there are many unbelievers even within the church who will go to hell. He talks about hell a lot.
This is part of the Gospel because it's telling us why we need peace with God and how to find it. And that an honest moral reckoning of our lives is necessary. Jesus also says a lot about obedience. Look at the Sermon on the Mount.
Three whole chapters in which Christ describes a life of perfect obedience that he

expects his disciples to live—obedience in thought, word, and deed. It's good news to hear about God's perfection and how a sinful life can be transformed into a pure and holy life.

There are also the hard sayings of Jesus like his remark that unless you deny yourself and take up your cross, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. And unless you hate your father and mother and your own life, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. And when he says his followers will suffer persecution, and that people will hate them like he was hated. These hard saying are also part of the Gospel. It's good news to know that suffering for Christ and giving up things for his kingdom will be worth it on the day of judgment when God's friends and God's enemies are separated.

Here's the point:

The Gospel is not just the happiest part of the news, it's all the news.

Listen to this verse from Revelation 16.

Then I saw another angel flying overhead with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come."

Even the announcement of God's judgment is called the eternal Gospel.

In judgment the enemies of God are finally defeated and Christ's kingdom is established forever and that's good news.

On our drive to North Carolina last week Allison and I listened to a podcast called Murder Book by Michael Connelly, the crime fiction writer, who was also once a journalist for the LA Times.

The podcast was about the longest criminal case in Los Angeles history.

In 1987 a young man named Jade Clark was murdered during a carjacking. Detective Rick Jackson told Jade's mother, Yolanda Clark, that he would solve the case and that justice would be done. He solved it quickly. They knew who the killer was, but it was not until this year 2019, 32 years later, after many complications and setbacks that he was finally convicted.

In the tenth episode a guilty verdict is finally handed down after a lengthy trial and Yolanda Clark addresses the members of the jury.

She's an elderly woman and you can hear it in her voice. I found transcript online:

Jurors . . . If I could just take a minute of your time. I know you all had to look at all this evidence. This has been a 30-year journey. This child meant the world to me, and I had to forgive this person in order for him not to block my blessings. Instead of me becoming a

victim, I became a victor, and because of Detective Jackson coming to my home and looking me in the eye and saying, “I don’t care how long it takes. I will solve this,” . . . and each time, this guy wasted taxpayers money and kept, you know, playing the system, and I’m not the only one who was affected by this, other families or other crimes that he did, and he felt that he got away, but the fact of it is, is I’m not built to break, and so I believed in it, and I said, “You know what? Delayed does not mean denied.”

She doesn’t just focus on that moment when the verdict is read, but she looks back over the three decades, the twists and turns and frustrations and setbacks and understands that this is all the turning of the wheel of justice.

She even says in some later comments that God himself orchestrated one particular delay that frustrated her at first but later she saw a purpose for it.

For us listening to this podcast, the gratitude and relief at hearing the verdict came because we knew the whole 32 year story.

The Gospel is not just part of the biblical story but the whole story of God’s redemption of this fallen world and the implications for every person.

When you get that, it gives you a big, serious view of life.

C.S. Lewis once said that he liked to take his Christianity the same way he took his whiskey—straight. Well, welcome to the four Gospels.

There is joy here and also hard realism about sin and judgment and transformed lives and a day of reckoning that will be victory for some and calamity for others.

The Gospel is the whole story of God's redemption of this fallen world,
it's the entire witness of Scripture with all its sobering implications and . . .

MP#2 The Gospel is the specific proclamation of salvation through Christ

And that's the other point Mark makes in this opening line.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

He's saying that this book will be about the identity of Jesus and the fact that
by him and because of him good news has come into the world.

Every incident in the Gospel of Mark is about Jesus.

Let's try to imagine how the opening line of Mark's Gospel sounded to the people
who first heard it: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
Jesus. The name Jesus carries a lot of weight for us now—you always notice when
someone says "Jesus." You feel something when name spoken.

A few months ago Allison showed me a video clip of a car that had crashed and
caught on fire and some bystanders were trying to pull the passenger out.
It was being filmed by two African-American women who were doing their part
by praying to Jesus. Jesus, help him, Jesus. Save him, Jesus.
Give them strength, Jesus. And when they finally got him out, Thank you, Jesus.
When you hear the name of Jesus spoken like that it humbles you and makes you
grateful. When you hear his name spoken in vain it saddens and hurts you.
It would seem improper to us, or at least odd, if someone named their son Jesus,
but there are a lot of men in the Hispanic world who are named Jesus and it was
like that in the Lord's own day.

So the name Jesus wouldn't have grabbed their attention like it grabs ours.

There wasn't anything special about it.

Jesus was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, which
means Savior, or God saves. Jesus was a common name in Judea.

But Christ would have gotten everyone's attention in a big way, because Christ
means Messiah. Mark was saying that Jesus of Nazareth is none other than the
long-awaited descendent of David, the one the prophets said would deliver Israel
and establish God's kingdom in the world.

And Son of God would have meant even more to those who first heard it.
Throughout Mark's Gospel Jesus is declared to be the Son of God by God the
Father himself at his baptism, by the demons, by the Jewish high priest,
and by the Roman centurion who oversaw his crucifixion.

Son of God was a title that marked Jesus as having a unique and intimate

relationship with God the Father. And finally it can't be explained in any other way but that Jesus is God himself.

Mark hints at the deity of Jesus right here at the beginning.

He quotes Isaiah 40, Behold I send my messenger, prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

And if you turn to Isaiah 40 read those verses and keep reading you come to this:

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

What's the good news? Your God has come.

So Mark announces that the good news he has to tell is about Jesus, who is the Messiah and the Son of God, or, even better, God the Son.

But what exactly is this good news about Jesus?

We have evidence from very early Christian history that Mark's Gospel is the record of Peter's personal, eyewitness account of Jesus Christ.

Mark was Peter's assistant, Peter was Mark's mentor and Mark apparently wrote down all of Peter's remembrances and that became this book.

In fact, one of the early church fathers calls Mark's Gospel the Memoirs of Peter.

I asked you earlier that if you had to summarize the Gospel in a few sentences, what would you say?

If you asked Peter to summarize the Gospel in a few sentences, what would he say?

Well, we know what he would say, because in Acts 10 Peter visited the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius.

He told him who Jesus was and everything he had done, his miracles, his crucifixion and his resurrection, the whole story of Jesus and this is how Peter sums it up, two sentences.

Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

If the Gospel of Mark is a full account of the good news, then this is the good news in a nutshell: Forgiveness of sins through Jesus' name. Jesus who is judge himself. And that means no fear in life or death or judgment.

What the Christian faith proclaims to the world is not a philosophy or a system of ethics. It proclaims the good news of God's work of redemption in history.

And more specifically, it proclaims the good news of the man Christ Jesus who came from heaven to open the way to eternal life.

When you hear good news it changes you.

Yolanda Clark, when she heard that verdict and knew justice finally done, she says later she finally had a sense of closure.

If your physician called and told you the good news that you were cured, or your biopsy had come back negative, that news would change you, lift you. And the good news of forgiveness through Jesus is the best good news of all.

Harry Ironside was a well-known pastor, theologian, evangelist in the early and mid twentieth century. The story is told of a time he was preaching in a park in San Francisco, where he had been working with the Salvation Army.

He was approached by a man who was the president of the atheist society.

In front of the crowd he challenged Ironside to a public debate on the existence of God.

Ironside said: I will come on one condition, that you bring with you one man or woman whose life has been changed by the good news of atheism.

You can bring a former prostitute who heard the good news there is no God, left her degrading profession and became a moral woman.

Or you can bring a former drunkard who heard the good news there is no God and put down his bottle and became hard worker and good husband.

For every one you bring, I will bring one hundred whose lives were once wasted by sin but who have been touched by the good news of Jesus Christ.

And leading this parade will be the Salvation Army band.

There's some rhetorical flourish there, but it's true.

Jesus Christ accomplished the salvation of the world and that's the best news you could ever hear.