

Basic Training Bible Ministries

presents

The Gospel According to Jesus

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“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Joh 3:14–15

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Introduction

This present study follows a series of studies on the presentation of the Gospel (Good News) message throughout the Bible. We began with “The Gospel According to Isaiah,” then to “The Gospel According to David,” followed by “The Gospel According to Abraham,” “The Gospel According to Moses,” and “The Gospel According to Noah.” Our next and final study will be “The Gospel According to Paul” in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in October 2017.

The object of these studies is to show that the Gospel message of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world—His crucifixion and resurrection providing for our eternal salvation—is the central message of the Bible.

It is also designed to demonstrate that salvation in every age, in spite of other dispensational distinctions, is always by grace, through faith in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. The Early Anticipation of Jesus’ Gospel

We need to bear in mind that “gospel” means “good news.” As Christians, we tend to limit the meaning of gospel to the essential message leading to salvation, such as “*whoever believes in Him [shall] not perish but have everlasting life*” (Joh 3:16), or “*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*” (Act 16:31). However, the term “gospel” has a much wider usage throughout the Bible (consider Isa 61:1 with Luk 4:8), as we will see in this study. The common factor is that it always points to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether prophetically or in retrospect.

A. His Names Foretold

In the Bible, one of the many designations for God is “The Name” (3Jo 1:7, literally, “for the Name”). It conveys the idea of essence, character, mighty deeds, and reputation. The names given to the Savior in Scripture are almost endless, but let’s consider just these. Speaking to Joseph, an angel of the Lord says:

“And she [Mary] will bring forth a Son, and you will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. So all of this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isa 7:14], saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Mat 1:21–23

The name “*Jesus*” is the same as “Joshua” in the Old Testament and means “Salvation of Jehovah” and, by implication, “Anointed Savior.” Matthew gives us the meaning of “*Immanuel*”—“*God with us,*” or “God in our midst.” How is that for an introduction to the Gospel!

It would take several pages to list all the names used in the Bible for our Lord and Savior—just to encompass His majesty and might—but consider Isa 9:6, where we have four names. Think about how beautiful they are:

1. Wonderful Counselor

Though many translators take this as two distinct titles, “*Wonderful, Counselor,*” possibly based on the angel of the Lord’s response to the mother of Samson (Jdg 13:18). In keeping with the other names, all involving two roots, it is best to keep this title consistent (see Isa 11:2; Isa 25:1; and Isa 28:29, where the two titles are used together). The NET Bible translates this as “Extraordinary Strategist” since the context of Isa 9:3–5 is His military might. In even greater ways, think of all that is encompassed in Jesus’ words to His disciples, “*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (Joh 16:33). We could never begin to count all the ways this is proven true just in our own lives.

2. Mighty God

This could be translated “the warrior God,” in line with Exo 15:3; Psa 45:3–4, Psa 45:6–7. This flows from the first title, He who is mighty in strategy is a valiant warrior in battle, victorious in all He does. Note that this is a title of Jehovah in Isa 10:21–23 (much to the chagrin of the Jehovah’s Witnesses). Compare also Deu 10:17 and Jer 32:18.

3. Everlasting Father

The King was to be a “*Father*” to His people. He would guard, provide for, and protect them. Here, this care will extend for all eternity. Some take this to mean, “the Father of eternity,” which is certainly true of Jesus Christ, but probably not the thought here. If we continue the flow of thought in the names, because His strategy brings victory, His people will reside in peace, thus the next title.

4. Prince of Peace

The final prospect brought about by the Messiah is peace—both with God and among men. Many figures are used to portray the peaceful environment of His kingdom (see Mic 4:4–6), which will be established on the conditions of “peace through military victory.” He will defeat and destroy all the schemes of the devil (2Co 2:11; Eph 6:10–11; Heb 2:14–15; 1Jo 3:8). The result will be a world kingdom wherein peace with God and all mankind reigns (see Rom 5:1–5 with Eph 2:14 and 2Th 1:2; 2Th 3:6).

B. At the Virgin Birth

“Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” Luk 2:10–11

The phrase “good tidings” is *evangelizomai*, the verb form of *evangel* or Gospel. Literally, “I evangelize you,” or “I bring you the Gospel.” From this Gospel will come “great joy” to all mankind (every tribe, tongue, and nation). The place, “*the city of David*,” links the Savior to the Davidic Covenant (2Sa 7:12–17), which promised the Messiah (Anointed One). This is amplified by the title “*Christ*” (anointed) who is identified as “*the Lord*” (God in the flesh). Just think how much “good news” is packed in this announcement!

As an added highlight, this announcement occurred in the sheepfolds outside of Bethlehem where, from ancient times the “*tower of Eder*” stood (Gen 35:21). This is translated “tower of the flock,” which prophetically was declared to be the place where Messiah would come and where His kingdom would begin (Mic 4:6–8). This tower and its prophetic significance was known from the time of Jacob—and possibly long before!

C. Declared at His Bar-Mitzvah

“And he said to them, ‘Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My father’s business?’” Luk 2:49

Beginning in Luk 2:21 is a very interesting section. First, His name “*JESUS*” (“Salvation of Jehovah,” Mat 1:21), is given by the angel. Then, in Luk 2:22, the Greek reads, “their (plural) purification.” Throughout this section, both Mary and Joseph are included (see Luk 2:27, Luk 2:33, Luk 2:39, Luk 2:41). Although it was Mary’s purification required by the Law (Lev 12:2–4), Joseph would be included in the offering and dedication of the firstborn to the Lord (Exo 13:1–2). The point is that Mary and Joseph were dedicated to pious obedience to the “*law of the Lord*” (Luk 2:39). Also, at this time, Simeon and Anna testify to both His identity and mission as Savior (see “*Consolation ... Lord’s Christ ... Your salvation*” in Luk 2:25–26, Luk 2:30).

Then, flowing out of this dedication of Mary’s “firstborn” comes the story of Jesus in the temple. At this time, Jesus was “*twelve years old*” (Luk 2:42). It was common for the Jews to anticipate, for a year, what we call today the Bar Mitzvah, when the young man became a “son of the Law.” It was at this time that the child (*teknon*) became a man (*huios*), and chose his life’s work. Thus, the words of Jesus take on much greater significance, “*Did you not know that I must be about My father’s business.*” Specifically, in the context, this would be expounding His Father’s Word,

in keeping with Joh 1:18 “*He has declared Him.*” The verb used here means to “exegete.”

II. The First Proclamation of Jesus’ Gospel

A. His First Public Message

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor ...” Luk 4:18

The events leading up to this point are significant, due to His relationship to the Holy Spirit. Jesus, “*being filled with the Holy Spirit,*” is then “*led by the Spirit*” (Luk 4:1–2) into the wilderness, where He is tempted for forty days. Being victorious in these temptations, Jesus then “*returned in the power of the Spirit*” to Nazareth (Luk 4:14–16). His teaching in the synagogues is not recorded (Luk 4:15) until He spoke in Nazareth.

The passage to which the scroll of Isaiah was opened for Him to read was Isaiah 61, which begins by speaking of His relationship to the Holy Spirit. As the “*anointed*” of God, He was sent to “*preach the gospel.*” Again, this fits with His words at the age of twelve to His mother and Joseph (Luk 2:49). The effect of His preaching would be to bring comfort “*to the poor ... heal[ing to] the brokenhearted ... liberty to the captives ... sight to the blind ... [and] liberty [to the] oppressed.*” All of this was to “*proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.*” The inauguration of His kingdom, and the plan of salvation, had come!

Though the people expected a military/political deliverer, Jesus’ plan and purpose was so much greater. His kingdom was not of this world (Luk 23:42; Joh 18:36), and only those who would be “*born again*” (from above) would enter into it (Mat 18:1; Joh 3:3, Joh 3:7). Let us now consider the “Gospel of the Kingdom.”

B. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” Mar 1:1, 14–15

There are many, particularly among dispensationalists, who consider this “*gospel*” that Jesus preached as different from the Gospel preached by the Apostle Paul. Others suggest that Jesus had a simple Gospel of “Do unto others” or “Love your neighbor as yourself,” which Paul then radically altered, making the issue faith in Jesus Christ. Again, we must apply the principle of “progressive revelation” to understand that the revelation of the plan of redemption is an unfolding story.

First, we need to take a careful look at the message of Jesus in the light of His generation. Just how is the kingdom of God “*at hand*”? And why is there such emphasis on repentance in the synoptic Gospels, but not in the Gospel of John or the Epistles of Paul? With this as a foundation, we will then consider the similarities and differences between the message of Jesus and that of Paul.

The Lord Jesus came to fulfill, not only the plan of salvation for all men, but also God’s promise of an eternal kingdom to Israel. Although we find that this kingdom is of much wider scope than just Israel, the promises God made in the Old Testament must be fulfilled (Rom 3:3).

So, Jesus came as the long-awaited King, which God promised in His covenant with David.

C. The Davidic Covenant

“I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” 2Sa 7:12–13

That the King had finally come, after one thousand years, was certainly “good news.” For with the coming of the King came also the beginning of His kingdom. Unfortunately for most of Israel, the kingdom was to be far different than what they had anticipated! It was to be, not just an earthly kingdom, but a spiritual and heavenly kingdom also. And the requirement for entrance into that kingdom was regeneration, to be “*born again*”—by faith in the King (Joh 3:3, Joh 3:5).

D. The Call to Repentance

Why does the call to repentance seem to dominate the message of both John and Jesus in the Gospels? Beyond the Book of Acts, the command “*repent*” is not found in the epistles and occurs only in Revelation chapters 2–3, where it is used seven times, and addressed to those who are already believers, who have drifted away from “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom 1:5; Rom 16:26).

The word “*repent*” means “change your mind” and confronts a deep-seated attitude that is contrary to God. It reveals a non-submissive spirit of latent rebellion. This was the prevailing attitude when Jesus entered into the Nation of Israel. Beginning with John, the call to repent revealed that being the “sons of Abraham” (see Joh 8:33) gained them nothing. It showed them that they were just as sinful and lost as the Gentiles, whom they despised. It was a rebuke to their sense of spiritual entitlement, and most of them responded with anger.

They wanted their King, but they wanted Him their way! They wanted a political/military leader to free them from Rome, and then leave them alone. When Jesus came demanding total spiritual renovation (Matthew chapters 5–6, the Sermon

on the Mount), they hardened their hearts to Him. This is why—as the opposition against Him intensified—Jesus began to teach in parables, so as to confirm them in their blindness and hardness of heart (Mat 13:10–15). The Sermon on the Mount revealed the Law of Moses from the mind of its Author. The standard set in it could be fulfilled only by Jesus Christ in the life of those born again by faith. The resulting holiness was “beautiful” in God’s sight (1Ch 16:29; Psa 29:2; Psa 96:9; Psa 110:3).

Today, because of a misuse of the term, “*repent*” is presented as a call to “turn from your sins,” a sense in which it is rarely used in Scripture, and then most often to believers (again, see Revelation chapters 2–3).

When John the Baptist came preaching repentance, his focus was on a radical change of mind among the Jewish people, recognizing they were sinners in need of not just a King, but a Savior. His call to repent always pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ (Mat 3:1–3). This is clearly shown in Mar 1:4–5, Mar 1:7–8). The “*baptism of repentance*” was an outward means of “confessing their sins” and, thus, acknowledging their need for a Savior who alone could give them “*remission [forgiveness] of sins.*”

In John MacArthur’s book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, we find this curious quote:

“No message that eliminates repentance can properly be called the gospel, for sinners cannot come to Jesus Christ apart from a radical change of heart, mind, and will.” (The Gospel According to Jesus, pg. 182)

While I whole-heartedly agree that repentance is a “*radical change of heart, mind, and will,*” I am not convinced that the call to “*repent*” constitutes the Gospel message. If what he says is true, then the Gospel of John is “no gospel,” for the word “repent” does not occur in the book!

Later, MacArthur reinforces this idea:

“Herein lies the fallacy of today’s popular approach to evangelism. The gospel appeal is tacked onto a wholly inadequate explanation of what it means to believe. The modern definition of faith eliminated repentance; it erases the moral significance of believing; it obviates the work of God in the sinner’s heart; it makes an ongoing trust in the Lord optional. Far from championing the truth that human works have no place in salvation, modern easy-believism has made faith itself a wholly human work, a fragile, temporary attribute that may or may not endure” (ibid., pg. 187).

I do not write these things to diminish the value of John MacArthur's ministry. I have great respect for him, in spite of some strong differences scripturally. But regarding the above quote, I would simply make three points:

- First, the Gospel of John obviously “*eliminated*” the call to repent. This in no way has the effect of “[obviating: opposing/resisting] *the work of God*” in salvation.
- Secondly, MacArthur puts the Apostle John, the “disciple Jesus loved,” the one who knew Him best, in the camp of “*easy-believism*.” The alternative is “*hard-believism*,” which sounds ludicrous, since Jesus Himself said that we must learn to trust as little children (Mat 18:3). However, MacArthur—to make his point further—has written a book called *Hard to Believe*. In this book, after referring to Luk 14:26–30, he says this:

“The price (of salvation) is a willingness to hate your father and mother, if necessary, hate your own life, carry your cross, and come after Jesus ... The complete surrender of all possessions is the essence of salvation. It is, ‘I give up everything. I deny myself. I offer my life, both in terms of death, if need be, and in terms of obedience in life ... the pearl of great price ... is the saving grace of Jesus Christ that we are hopelessly undeserving of, but that we can claim as our own by denying ourselves, picking up our cross daily, and following Him.’” (Hard to Believe, pgs.15–16)

In *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur says, “*People have always stumbled over the simplicity of salvation*” (pg. 56). Yet, earlier in the book, regarding the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3), which defines the terms of salvation throughout the fourth Gospel, MacArthur says, “*Some view this passage of Scripture (John 3) as a statement about how easy it is to believe in Jesus Christ. That is not the point of this episode at all*” (pg. 51). Then, in his book, *Hard to Believe*, he makes this amazing statement, “*You need to be desperate enough to embrace Christ no matter what **the price***” (pg. 11, emphasis added). If I am not mistaken, Isaiah made it clear that salvation was “*without price*” (Isa 55:1); and in Romans, Paul speaks of eternal life as a “*free gift*” seven times (Rom 3:24; Rom 5:15 (twice), Rom 5:16 (twice), Rom 5:17, 18 (implied), and Rom 6:23).

My first question on reading these words is, how did John, and Paul miss this “*hard-believism*”? I believe the error lies in confusing the demands of salvation—by faith alone—with the call to discipleship, which follows salvation. That not all disciples are believers is clear from the example of Judas (Joh 6:60–64). That not all believers follow through to the end as faithful disciples is evident from countless biblical examples (2Ti 4:10).

- Thirdly, MacArthur, due to his belief in “the perseverance of the saints,” denies that it is possible that “faith . . . may not endure.” However, Jesus suggested to Peter that this was a possibility (Luk 22:31–32). Much of the rebuke of the author of the book of Hebrews is based on the fact that for many believers, their faith was failing (Heb 5:11–14).
- Finally, MacArthur says that passages like Luk 9:23 and Luk 14:28–30 are “*the price*” of salvation (*Hard to Believe*, pg. 15). The Bible tells me that the only price that must be paid was paid by the Lord Jesus Christ at the cross (1Pe 1:18–21) and, therefore, salvation and eternal life are “*free gift[s] of God*,” gained by faith alone (Rom 5:15–18; Rom 6:23). If to receive the “*free gift of God*,” the “*price*” is giving up everything, then it is not a free gift! Even more amazing is that in the original 1988 printing of *The Gospel According to Jesus*, MacArthur addresses the passage of Joh 3:14–15 regarding the serpent in the wilderness, and says this, “*A more careful study of Numbers 21 reveals that Jesus was not painting a picture of easy faith ... In order to look at the bronze snake on the pole, they had to drag themselves to where they could see it*” (quoted by Tom Stegall in Vol. 19, No. 87 of the *Grace Family Journal*, pg. 23).

Lastly, Paul uses two Old Testament references as the foundation of his Gospel: the faith of Abraham (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6) and the words of Hab 2:4, “*the just shall live by faith*” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). We will consider the contrasts and parallels of the Gospel as preached by Jesus and Paul in our next session.

Three Perspectives of the Gospel

Based on the principle of progressive revelation, there are three distinct perspectives on the Gospel message:

1. During the Old Testament dispensation, the prospect was “He is coming” (Gen 3:15; 2Sa 7:12–17; Gal 3:8–9).
2. During the earthly life of Jesus, it was “the King has come” (Luk 2:10–11; Joh 1:29).
3. In this present Church Age, the message is, “He has come, and He is coming again!” (1Co 15:3–4, 1Co 15:50–58; 1Th 4:13–18).

Five Reasons to Study History

1. Because history is His (God’s) story
2. Scripture is history from the perspective of the plan of redemption.
3. Progressive revelation is the unfolding of this story.
4. Only a dispensational approach is consistent for all of Scripture.
5. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of its historical/cultural/textual context.

III. Does the Gospel According to Jesus Differ with Paul's Gospel?

The answer to this question is: Yes and No. That may sound a bit equivocal (ambiguous) and needs some explanation. Once again, due both to progressive revelation and dispensational issues, there are bound to be some outward differences. Jesus lived at the end of the Age of the Jews; Paul ministered at the beginning of the Church Age. In between, the plan of redemption was accomplished in the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one could reasonably assume that the fulfillment of the single greatest event in all of human history would fail to change the presentation of the Gospel!

A. Peripheral Differences

1. Because of progressive revelation—the unfolding story of the Bible—the focus is not yet on the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.
2. Jesus came first to deal with unbelieving Israel. He first sent the disciples only to the Jewish people (Mat 10:6).
3. Jesus' offer of the Kingdom to Israel was a genuine offer (Mat 11:14). His faithfulness regarding the Old Testament promises to Israel is immutable, yet because of Israel's rejection, they have been delayed until after the Church Age (Rom 11:25).
4. The Gospel message that "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Mat 3:2; Mar 1:15) means that the King has come.
5. The demand for repentance, both by John and Jesus, required that Jews see themselves as sinners, not as those automatically saved due to being the seed of Abraham (Joh 8:31–33).
6. Jesus' message differed because the "mystery" of the Church Age was not yet revealed, and could not be until Israel rejected Him.

B. Essential Unity

1. The standard of salvation "by grace through faith" set by Abraham has never changed (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6–7, Gal 3:11).
2. The focus of the Gospel message is always personal trust in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. However, with the finished work of Christ on the cross, the focus is no longer just Jesus' identity (Messiah, King, Savior), it now turns to His completed work of redemption on the cross.
4. John pointed to Jesus as God's Anointed One (Messiah) who came both to save and to rule. Paul points to Jesus as God-in-the-flesh, who has purchased our salvation by the price of His blood, offered as a substitutionary sacrifice for all mankind.
5. As with every promise of salvation throughout the Bible, the focus is trust in the One who makes the promise. There are two foundational Old Testament texts which define the Gospel:

- a. Abraham sets the standard for salvation, as affirmed in three major epistles: Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6–7; Jam 2:23.
- b. The prophet Habakkuk (Hab 2:4) confirms this, also quoted three times in the epistles: Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38.

Any divergence from these truths constitutes “another gospel” according to Paul (Gal 1:6–9), even if it includes biblical practices (see Act 15:1–5; Gal 3:10–14).

6. There can be no entrance into the eternal kingdom without faith in the King (Mat 18:3).
7. There can be no place in God’s eternal kingdom apart from the possession of eternal life.
8. The heart of Jesus’ message is the need for regeneration through faith (John 3).
9. Indications that Jesus was anticipating the Church Age are:
 - a. His shift to teaching in parables, to conceal the truth from the unbelievers (Matthew 13)
 - b. His sending of the 70, without restricting them to Israel (Luk 10:1–12)
 - c. His prophecy of the building of the Church, yet future (Mat 16:18–19)
 - d. The parable of the vineyard, shortly before His crucifixion (Mat 21:33–44)
 - e. The Upper Room Discourse (John chapters 13–17), in which Jesus teaches the disciples truths that anticipate the Church Age

C. Introduction of the “Mystery”

Jesus introduced the idea of “*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*” (Mat 13:11; Luk 8:10). Paul incorporates all the plural “mysteries” into the doctrine of the “*mystery*” of the Church Age, which is like a paragraph of time inserted into history (Rom 11:25; Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9; Eph 3:3–9; Col 1:26–27, etc.).

The essence of the mystery of the Church Age is that Old Testament saints could not have known it because it was never revealed until introduced by Jesus and further developed by Paul. It pertains to the time between the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts chapter 2) and the Rapture of the Church (1Th 4:13–18), which basically withholds the final seven years of the Age of Israel until the Tribulation Period. Bound up in this “mystery age” are many subordinate elements of which we will note six:

1. The mystery of godliness—the incarnation of Christ (1Ti 3:16)
2. The mystery of Israel’s spiritual blindness (Rom 11:25)
3. The mystery of the union between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32)
4. The mystery of the Rapture of the Church (1Co 15:51)
5. The mystery of iniquity—coming of the antichrist (2Th 2:7)
6. The identity of mystery Babylon (Rev 17:5)

Jesus said that throughout this age, the “good seed” of the sons of the kingdom must flourish among the “bad seeds” of the evil one (Mat 13:24–30, Mat 13:37–43). Our presence in the world, personally, is to become conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; Rom 12:1–2; 2Co 3:18). Publically, our purpose is to be His ambassadors to a lost and dying world (2Co 5:14–21) in the hopes of winning some to faith in Christ. In order to be effective, we must understand that the “bad news” must precede the “good news.”

IV. There is No Good News Apart from the Bad News

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.” Joh 5:28–29

This section is vitally important, though it can be expressed briefly. No one will ever believe the “good news” until they first acknowledge the “bad news”—that we are all hopeless sinners doomed to eternal separation from God as the result of the curse of sin.

To understand this curse, we first must recognize (though we cannot comprehend) that God is holy. He cannot overlook sin; He is bound by His nature to judge it—without compromise. All sin is an offence to His very nature because His holiness promotes hope, healing, joy, peace, wholeness, beauty, and love, among other things. Sin not only violates every one of these, but it perverts and destroys them. Now you know why the authors of Scripture got so excited about God’s holiness (Exo 15:11; 1Ch 16:29; Psa 29:2; Psa 96:9; Psa 110:3; Luk 1:74–75)!

Secondly, we must understand that the sin of Adam brought sin and death to every member of the human race (Gen 3:1–19; Rom 5:12; 1Ti 2:13–15). We will study this topic more fully in our upcoming conference on “The Gospel According to Paul.”

The necessity of comprehending the “bad news” before we can receive the “good news” calls for the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. Note the order of conviction (convincing) in Joh 16:8–11:

*“And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of **sin**, because they do not believe in Me; of **righteousness**, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of **judgment**, because the ruler of this world is judged.” (emphasis added)*

The curse of death came because of the sin of Adam. However, following the death of Christ for every man, sin is summarized in unbelief. The refusal to believe the Gospel is the only sin that will send anyone to Hell. Having made that point, the Holy Spirit works to convince men that righteousness is available through faith in Jesus Christ who, by His

ascension, proved His total victory over sin and death. Rejection of this fact can only lead to judgment—the sharing of the doom of Satan and his fallen angels (Mat 25:41).

It is amazing how both bad news and good news are often so clearly presented in simple terms in a single passage of Scripture. Consider Rom 3:21–24:

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all [the unlimited offer] and on all [the personal application] who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

If you accept the truth of the bad news, it is very simple to receive the good news by faith, as a free gift (note again, “*justified freely,*” above).

With this brief overview, we can now go back to our original passage (Joh 5:28–29) and define “the good” and “the evil.” Each of these terms has the definite article, identifying some specific act, not just general behavior. Those who have “done the good thing” are those who believe, and those who have “done the evil thing” are those who reject Christ and remain in their unbelief. Paul used this same formula in Rom 2:6–11. The greatest good that anyone could ever do is to receive Jesus Christ by faith. The greatest evil that anyone could ever do is to reject Him, and remain in unbelief:

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” Joh 6:29

V. The Simplicity and Security of the Gospel According to Jesus

We have already seen that there are many who do not believe in the simplicity of salvation. To state that it is a simple transaction is not to minimize the struggle we may go through coming to the point of faith. By emphasizing the simplicity of our salvation, we are stressing the fact that Jesus Christ did all the work for us on the cross. Our part is to trust Him when He says that He paid our debt, will freely forgive our sins, and will give us eternal life. Following are some examples that illustrate this:

A. The Simplicity of Salvation

1. Received in simple child-like trust, Mat 18:1–4
2. As simple as coming when called, Mat 11:28
3. As simple as looking at Him to live, Joh 3:14–15
4. As simple as drinking water, Joh 4:14
5. As simple as eating bread, Joh 6:33, Joh 6:35, Joh 6:51, Joh 6:54, Joh 6:56
6. As simple as entering a door, Joh 10:9
7. As simple as receiving a free gift, Rom 6:23

8. As simple as calling for help, Rom 10:13
9. As simple as believing in Jesus Christ, Joh 6:47
10. As simple as hearing and believing the Gospel, Rom 10:17; Eph 1:13–14

B. The Security of Salvation (Seven “Nevers”)

While some deny the simplicity of salvation, others deny the security of our salvation. They believe that once received, eternal life must be “*kept*” by us through obedience to God. This denies the truth of 1Pe 1:3–5:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are **kept by the power of God through faith** for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* (emphasis added)

It is crucial for every believer to grasp the security that we have in Christ, resting fully on His finished work for us on the cross. In each of the following passages (emphasis mine), the English word “*never*” translates two Greek words, *ou me*, which is the strongest form of negative in the Greek language. Fully translated, it means, “never, ever.” All seven of these are based on Jesus’ initial Gospel, in the Book of John, given to Nicodemus, “*that whoever believes in Him should not perish ...*” (Joh 3:16):

1. Joh 4:14, “*but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will **never** thirst.*”
2. Joh 6:35, “*And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall **never** hunger, and he who believes in Me shall **never** thirst’*” (actually twice in this verse).
3. Joh 6:37, “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means [**never**] cast out.*”
4. Joh 8:51, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall **never** see death.*”
5. Joh 8:52, “*Then the Jews said to Him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, “If anyone keeps My word he shall **never** taste death.”’*” (In the Greek, they actually say, “shall never taste death until eternity.”)
6. Joh 10:28, “*And I give them [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall **never** perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.*”
7. Joh 11:26, “*And whoever lives and believes in Me shall **never** die. Do you believe this?*”

VI. Five Examples of Jesus' Varied Approach

As we consider the approach Jesus used in ministry, certain truths must be kept in mind. Once again, we need to remember that the Bible is a story—history from God's perspective of the plan of redemption. Therefore, it is obviously progressive in its revelation of that plan.

Jesus' message is necessarily limited by both His Person, as God incarnate, and His time, toward the end of the Age of Israel (not including the Tribulation Period). Jesus always reflects the meekness and essential humility of the nature of God in presenting Himself to men. Our approach would be to go down the streets crying out, "Hey everybody, I am God come in the flesh and I am going to the cross to save you all!" Such an approach could never be that of the Son of Man, whose ministry was prophetically anticipated.

"He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench, till He sends forth justice to victory; and in His name the Gentiles will trust." Mat 12:19–21, from Isa 42:2–4

Therefore, His approach to the "good news" could not be—prior to the final act of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection—the same as that of the Apostle Paul. In His expression of divine humility, Jesus even relied on other witnesses than Himself to reveal His identity (Joh 5:31–47). Further, it was necessary that the kingdom be offered to Israel first, that in their rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah, He would be crucified.

All of these and many other points must be kept in mind when considering the Gospel as presented by Jesus. Some examples of His unique approach follow. It is also important to keep in mind that Jesus, being God, was omniscient. Therefore, because He knew what was in the heart of all men (Joh 2:24–25), He was able to zero in on the exact obstacle to faith in each soul. The following examples will be brief, with just a few points made regarding each one.

A. Jesus and Nicodemus (Joh 3:1–21)

Principle: No one can be saved by how much Scripture he knows or the good deeds he does.

This prolonged narrative sets the tone for all the passages in John that present the way of salvation. Jesus had to make the point **seven times** before Nicodemus got it. This passage raises some crucial questions, and has dogmatic answers.

1. Here we have Jesus—God in the flesh, the Sovereign Creator—speaking to an educated Jewish ruler, telling Him "*you must be born again.*"
2. When Nicodemus asks how this is possible, Jesus declares seven times that regeneration comes only by faith.

3. **Point:** This totally destroys the Calvinistic/reformed idea that regeneration precedes faith (see also Eph 1:13–14, which gives the events in order).
4. It is Jesus speaking in Joh 3:14–16, who makes it clear that “*the world*” is included in the offer of salvation, and that it is as simple as looking at the serpent on the pole, by faith (see also 1Jo 2:2).

B. Jesus and the Woman at the Well (Joh 4:1–26, Joh 4:28–30, Joh 4:39–42)

Principle: No one is so bad that they are beyond the reach of God’s grace and salvation!

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about being “*born again*” to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here, he addresses the necessity of drinking of the water of life. He was a master of matching His approach to the needs and condition of each soul. A few brief points will be sufficient:

1. Jesus uses the concept of “*living water*” not only because of her present need, but because her entire religion revolved around the history of Jacob’s well (Joh 4:12, 20).
2. He also knew that, deep in her heart, there was the hope that one day Messiah would come and clarify all confusion (Joh 4:25).
3. The idea of the “*fountain of ... water*” was a known Old Testament symbol for eternal life (Isa 12:3; Isa 55:1; Jer 2:13).
4. Jesus addressed the “bad news” just enough to convict her heart, and to give her the insight that He was “*a prophet*” (Joh 4:19).
5. By the end of their exchange, she was convinced, and convinced many others, that “*this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world*” (Joh 4:42).

C. Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler (Mat 19:16–22; Mar 10:17–22; Luk 18:18–23)

Principle: Absolutely no one is able to keep the Law or enter eternal life by their good deeds outweighing their bad deeds!

Many are confused by Jesus’ answers to the young ruler. However, the key to understanding this is in the way the young man approached Jesus. Some ask, “Why didn’t Jesus just tell him to believe?” The reasons are clear, as we examine the text:

1. In his opening sentence, the young ruler demonstrates three colossal errors in his thinking:
 - a. He calls Jesus “*Good Teacher,*” but when Jesus says, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God,*” he fails to acknowledge Jesus as God in the flesh.
 - b. He wants to “*do*” something to enter into eternal life. He believes he has the merit to receive eternal life as a reward, not a gift.

- c. He wants to “inherit” eternal life. But as Paul makes clear, you cannot inherit until first you are a son (Gal 3:26, Gal 3:29; Gal 4:6–7).
2. Since he approaches Jesus on the basis of works, Jesus sets out to convict him of the “bad news.” Though he thinks he is a Law-keeper (Luk 18:21), Jesus moves to the Tenth Commandment (Exo 20:17), to show that he is guilty of the sin of coveting.
3. In essence, Jesus says to him, “If you want to earn eternal life, the price is perfect holiness. The test of this is to sell all you have, give to the poor, and come and follow Me” (Luk 18:22). This the young man was unwilling to do so, proving that he was a sinner like the rest of us.

It is interesting that MacArthur calls this the “*true gospel*”! Then, he goes on to say that you must be “*willing to give up everything.*”

However, Jesus did not say “be willing,” He said, “do it!” By calling the young ruler to an uncompromising life of discipleship, Jesus gave him both the opportunity to break his arrogance and to learn, in humility, who He (God in the flesh) truly is. Still, the Gospel is inherent in this passage, for it is a call to “*Come to Me*” (Mat 11:28–30).

Principle: The Gospel invitation versus the call to discipleship: Are they separate, or one in the same?

1. First of all, is it possible to be a disciple, and not be a believer? The answer is evidently “Yes” because of Judas, who was among the twelve and was not a believer (see Joh 6:64; Joh 13:10–11).
2. Secondly, is it then possible to be a believer, and not be a disciple? Again, the answer must be “Yes” due to the case of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and others (see Joh 12:42–43; Joh 19:38–39).
3. What would be the point of calling an unbeliever to become a disciple? Isn’t this what Jesus did with all of His disciples? Not until they were disciples did they believe (see Joh 2:11).

D. Jesus at the Tomb of Lazarus (Joh 11:1–27)

Principle: Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ **has** eternal life, and **has** passed from death into life (Joh 5:24).

Lazarus, a believer, was not dead! His body was buried, but he was very much alive. The story of Luk 16:19–31 is likely dealing with a different Lazarus, but the same truth is made clear. When Jesus called Lazarus forth, it was not from death to life (except for his body), but rather from fullness of life back to life in this world.

Here, in the very presence of death, Jesus declares the essential Gospel (Joh 11:25–26). Again, the only criteria, as throughout the Gospel of John, is “*believe*.” Martha demonstrates the only correct response to the Gospel, “*Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God*” (Joh 11:27), which is in keeping with the theme-intent of the Gospel of John (Joh 20:30–31).

E. Jesus and the Thief on the Cross (Luk 23:41)

Principle: Entering eternal life does not require anything you can’t do from a cross!

What must one believe or do to enter eternal life? It is limited to what one can do on a cross! This thief, who began the day by mocking and scorning Christ (Luk 23:39), came under conviction and cried out for mercy. Probably affected by the majesty of the man, Jesus—bearing with poise and fortitude His own crucifixion—he cried out, “*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*” (Luk 23:42).

I truly doubt if this thief had much in the way of scriptural understanding. It is unlikely that he could have even anticipated the Lord’s response, “*Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise*” (Luk 23:43). His eternal life depended not on anything he could do. Nor did it even depend on how much he understood. It all depended on his recognition that here, truly, was “[Jesus] *THE KING OF THE JEWS*” (Luk 23:38; Mat 27:37).

The question is often asked, “Just how much does one need to know or understand to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life?” My answer is this, “You must know that He is your only hope, and trust in Him alone.” This is what the thief did, and we who believe will meet him in eternity.

VII. The Ongoing Scope of the Gospel (Joh 7:37–39, cf., Joh 4:14 and Joh 10:10b)

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” Joh 7:38

The Gospel moves logically from salvation to sanctification, as is illustrated by the flow of the book of Romans:

- Condemnation—the problem of sin (Romans 1–3)
- Justification—the provision of salvation (Romans 4–5)
- Sanctification—the means for spiritual growth (Romans 6–8)
- Dispensation—the historical perspective of the Church (Romans 9–11)
- Transformation—accepting the challenge of our age (Romans 12–16)

The point here is that the “Gospel” is not just the message of salvation for the unbeliever, it is the message of ongoing salvation for the believer. Why else would Paul want to “*preach the gospel*” to those in Rome who had already believed (Rom 1:14–15). Not only are we saved (sanctified, “set apart to God”) at the moment of salvation, we are also

“*being sanctified*” (conformed to Christ) throughout life (Heb 10:10, Heb 10:14). Consider the following points:

A. Parallels with Joh 4:14 and Joh 6:53–56

Jesus previously used the metaphor of drinking, both for salvation and for sanctification. It is a common Old Testament figure (see Isa 55:1; Jer 2:13).

B. The Relationship between Salvation and Sanctification

Paul, in Romans 6, shows the natural and logical relationship between salvation and sanctification. Believers who do not grow and become fruitful are “abnormal.”

At the moment of salvation, the finished work of Christ is applied to the believer. We are placed “in Christ” by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13), and share in all He is, and all He has done. Paul explains that three things are applied to us, each of which has a transforming effect (Rom 6:1–10).

1. The crucifixion of Christ—thus removing all condemnation for sin. We are cleansed of sins: past, present, and future.
2. The burial—by which we are separated forever from this world.
Note: “*For he who has died has been freed from sin,*” (Rom 6:7). This same meaning is found in 1Pe 4:1–2).
3. The resurrection—by which we enter into the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

While these three great works are applied to us **positionally** at the moment of faith, they are “worked out” **practically** over the course of our lives (Phi 2:12–13).

This practical outworking of sanctification is also along a three-fold line. Life becomes a daily development—through spiritual growth—of the victory of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We do this by:

- **Knowing** the truth of what Christ has done (Rom 6:6, 9)
This comes through the sound teaching of God’s Word.
- **Reckoning** what Scripture says has happened as true (Rom 6:11)
Trusting in God’s Word as true we, “by faith,” begin to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- **Yielding/Presenting** our bodies to God, “as alive from the dead.”
This is where we get the exhortations to “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph 5:18), and to “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16).

This must become an act of daily renewal for the believer. Note that Jesus said this would occur “*as the Scripture has said*” (Joh 7:38). We could look to such passages as Isa 12:2–3:

*“Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid;
for YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has
become my salvation. Therefore with joy you will draw
water from the wells of salvation.”*

C. Faith Precedes Regeneration; Regeneration Leads to Practical Sanctification (Eph 1:13–23)

Note what Jesus said in Joh 7:38. From those who believe “*will flow ... living water*”! The future active indicative of the verb *reo* indicates the natural result of regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit. Again, this is essentially the same thing He said to the woman at the well (see Joh 4:14). I am convinced that every regenerate soul will bear some fruit. Unfortunately it may be so little as to be unnoticeable—and far from what God intends.

In Eph 1:13–23, the Apostle Paul gives us a clear sequence of the salvation/sanctification experience. The flow of the argument is as follows:

1. First we hear the Gospel (Eph 1:13, compare Rom 10:17).
2. Then we trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior.
3. As a result of believing, we are sealed (and indwelt) with the Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our eternal inheritance (see 2Co 1:22).
4. We then need to grow in our understanding of our spiritual riches (Eph 1:17–18)—the treasures of Christ’s heavenly storehouse (Eph 1:3).
5. Finally, having learned of our privileges and potential as believers, we need to learn to rely on the indwelling power of the Spirit to make resurrection-life a reality in our experience (Eph 1:19–23), that we might live in the fullness of Christ (this is the filling of the Spirit, Eph 5:18).

The process of practical sanctification—spiritual growth to maturity resulting in service and fruitfulness—is the will of God for every believer. That many do not attain it is due not only to their own spiritual sluggishness (Heb 5:11–14), but also often to the failure of many pastors to study and teach the Word of God accurately and consistently.

Conclusion

The Gospel message is the “good news” about Jesus Christ. It pertains to who He is, and what He has accomplished for us by His sacrifice on the cross. It can be presented in many, many ways. The key is that we must always call on men and women, boys and girls, to trust in Jesus Christ alone, apart from any works on our part. It is “*by grace ... through faith ... not of ourselves*” (Eph 2:8–9). Obviously, all evangelism ought to be teaching evangelism. In whatever time we are given, we should make the message as clear and accurate as we are able. If we work

in tandem with the Holy Spirit (Joh 16:7–11) to convince men of the sin of unbelief, of the provision—through Christ—of righteousness, and of the impending judgment that waits for all who reject Him, we will not go far astray!