**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS**

**Romans 1:16-17**

If we’re going to share the good news of Jesus effectively, it’s imperative to fully understand the message. Truth needs to grip us before it can grip others.

One of the disturbing things that I’ve noticed in evangelism is that people are often far more willing to talk about their church than sharing Jesus. In this session, we’re going to learn about the ‘gospel of Jesus’ and confront its scope and grandeur. In much popular evangelism, we restrict the gospel to a simple, painless message of personal benefit and fulfilment. Jesus becomes another consumer accessory who will enrich our lives with peace and joy and guarantee a happy hereafter. Indeed, the whole process of salvation is analogous to ticking the right boxes on a form and completing the process by repeating a short prayer of acceptance. Conversion has been divested of its glory and power and reduced to a marketing transaction. No wonder few people who say the sinner’s prayer continue as saints in the kingdom of heaven.

The good news of Jesus is the most staggering and wonderful message in the world. Angels announced it with song, prophets predicted it, and people willingly gave up their lives to proclaim it. It is unlike any other message or ideology in the world. The good news of Jesus is ‘the power of God for salvation’ and is confirmed and attested by signs and wonders (Mark 16:20; Romans 15:17-19; Hebrews 2:3-4). The gospel narrative is simple, accessible, and profound and answers the most pressing questions of the age. So, let’s get down to business and grapple with the eternal truths of the gospel.

**1. THE EPIC NARRATIVE OF THE GOSPEL**. Our view of the gospel can be very cramped and restrictive. We see a few of the pieces but rarely fit them into the big picture. It would take me a week or two to unpack the full significance of the gospel, but in this session, I will attempt to give you the complete gospel overview, the BIG Picture. It’s up to you to fill in the smaller details and wrestle with some of the stickier questions like free will and predestination. The problem for many of us is that we can get stuck on some of these contentious questions and lose sight of the big picture: we ‘strain at a gnat and swallow a camel’. Alternatively, we become so obsessive about ‘revival’, ‘creation vs evolution’, ‘God’s sovereignty’ and even the ‘gifts of the Spirit’, that we lose sight of the gospel of Christ and the grace of God. The gospel never encourages obsessions but frees us to experience the wonderful grace of God.

The Greek word, ‘**euaggelion**’, that our English versions translate as ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’. Mark kicks off his Gospel with the statement, **‘The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah’ (Mark 1:1).** He doesn’t waste time but comes straight to the point: **the good news is the story of Jesus,** the long-awaited Messiah. Matthew develops this theme by emphasising that Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35). The idea of ‘Messiah’ and ‘Kingdom’ are alien to most people in the secularised Western world, but they were the religious currency of 1st Century Jewry. Indeed, after the resurrection, Jesus’ Messiahship and the advent of the Kingdom of God were the primary themes in the apostles’ ‘**kerygma’** (preaching). The Jesus of Nazareth who died and rose again, was the true Messianic King and his Kingdom had already burst into history. To understand the true significance of this, we need to start at the beginning of the story.

The gospel is generally described as the ‘good news of Jesus Christ’ (Romans 1:16 15:19, 29; 1 Corinthians 9:12,18’ 2 Corinthians 2:12’ 4:4; 9:13: 10:14; Galatians 1:7; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thess.3:2), but it is also described as the ‘gospel of God’ (Romans 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7, 1 Thessalonians 2, 2,8,9; 1 Timothy 1:11; 1 Peter 4:17). The focus of the gospel is God’s love and grace in Jesus.

**1. Creation was a failed project from its beginning.** **Christ’s death and our salvation predated the creation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9-10)**. God created the world in the full knowledge that he would bring into being a new creation. Christ’s death was not an afterthought, but a carefully planned operation: **‘This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge’ (Acts 2:23).** The good news of Jesus the Messiah predates the world. God anticipated the fall of human beings and created the world with a salvage plan already in place. The ‘salvage plan’ was more that an emergency rescue package that would deliver believers from impending disaster, but a plan to renovate and beautify the universe. God described the first creation as ‘very good’; the new creation will be infinitely better.

Christ is God’s agent of creation (Colossians 1:15-18 Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:1-3) and the inaugurator and creator of the new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). As the eternal Son, the image and Word of the Father, he brought into existence the fist creation. As the crucified and risen Messiah, he has been crowned Lord, King, and undisputed Head of the New creation. From the old, he creates something new, original, and splendid.

**2. God elected Abraham and gave him a preview of the gospel**. The gospel was not an afterthought. Paul argues in Galatians 3 that Abraham was given a preview of the gospel (Galatians 3:7-18). The ‘Seed’ who would bless the nations is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In his verbal skirmish with the Pharisees, Jesus asserted that Abraham had anticipated his coming (John 8:56-58). Paul also extrapolates from the story of Abraham God’s means of acquittal (Romans 4:1-5; Galatians 3:6). Abraham is justified by faith over 400 years before Moses and the Law and is given as a gift before the rite of circumcision.

**3.** **The Israelites were monotheists who believed that God reigned over the universe** (Psalm 47:5-9; 93; 96; 97:1-6; 99:1-5; 146:10; Exodus 15:18). His kingdom ruled the nations (Psalm 103:19; 145:10-13; 145:12-13; Daniel 7:14,18). The idea of ‘kingdom’ was firmly established in Israelite theology. In the theology of the era, Israel’s belief in God as the universal monarch was absurd and dismissed as a piece of nationalistic propaganda. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was a tiny kingdom surrounded by powerful super-states like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Each nation had its own pantheon of deities ruled over by a supreme god. Military conquest and empire were attributed to the patronage of these gods. The logic was simple: our gods are bigger than your gods because we defeated you and annexed your territory into our empire and enslaved your people. Power struggles on earth reflected cosmic struggles in heaven; god fought against god for supremacy on earth. Today the debate is different. Leaders threaten with nuclear arsenals, more sophisticated weapons, and bigger and better trained armies. In the ancient Near East, the context of threat was very different: “My gods are bigger than your gods.”

Israel redefined the theology of the Ancient Near East. They believed in One God who was the creator of heaven and earth and the ruler of all nations:

‘God reigns over the nations’ (Psalm 47:9). Moreover, against all logical odds, they believed that a King of the Davidic Dynasty would reign permanently in Jerusalem as God’s viceroy and adopted son (2 Samuel 7:11-17; I Chronicles 17: 3-5). This idea is repeated consistently in pro-monarchy Psalms:

“You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one,

I have sworn to David my servant,

“I will establish your line forever

And make your throne firm through all generations.

Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness –

And I will not lie to David,

That his line will continue forever

And his throne endure before me like the sun’

It will be established forever like the moon,

The faithful witness in the sky’ (Psalm 8:3-4, 35-37).

In the light of the political situation in the Ancient Near East, the description of the Davidic King seems totally fantastical and unrealistic. His kingdom will transcend the national borders of Judah and embrace the world (Psalm 2; 72:8-11). He will be the earth’s supreme King and ruler. Any writer who penned this as a coronation tribute to the King would have either been guilty of the most blasé flattery or have been politically delusional. Even the greatest of Israel’s kings never rivalled the Babylonians, Persians and Greeks in size and longevity of empire. The empires of Israel and Judah were hardly worthy of the name. They were small, local affairs.

The conclusion I’ve come to is that these coronation hymns anticipated the arrival of the greatest King of all.

**4.All the functional roles of the Jewish state, the prophet, priest, and King, anticipated the advent of the Messiah. Indeed, all the ritual of the temple and tabernacle anticipated Jesus.**

The demise of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BC and Judah in 598/7 and 587/6 BC, led to a radical reappraisal of state theology. The idolatry and moral failure of the main institutions of state, the Davidic dynasty, the priesthood, and the prophets, precipitated a crisis of faith. Surely God had promised that if a Davidic king sat on Judah’s throne, the kingdom would continue forever? The theological dilemma was resolved by a series of prophecies that predicted the arrival of a Davidic King. He would encapsulate in himself the roles of ruling monarch (2 Samuel 7:11-16; 1 Chronicles 17:3-15; Psalm 2; 72; Isaiah 11; Luke 1:29-33: Revelation 22:16) Great High Priest (Psalm 110) and the prophet foretold by Moses (Deut.18:18). Messianic theology blossomed in the Exile and in the post-exilic period. The way was made ready for Jesus. A saviour was on his way.

5. **Jesus came into the world as the Messiah and announced the advent of the Kingdom**. He fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecies of the coming ‘servant of the Lord’ (Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-8; 52:13-15; 53; 61:1-3; Philippians 2:6-11).

 \* **Renunciation of violence**. The Jews had crafted their Messianic theology on Daniel 7. Their anticipation and expectation of the Messiah was of a strong man who would defeat the Romans and replace their empire with his own. The Jews would be catapulted to the elite in this new world order and rule over the gentiles. It was a ‘top dog’ narrative in which the Jews were liberated from their conquered state to become the rulers of the world. Jesus’ apparent passivity, non-violence and unwillingness to challenge Roman rule in Palestine placed him at odds with the popular notion of the Messiah.

 \* **Crucifixion.** Conquering through suffering. **Acquittal** (Romans 5:1), **victory** (1 Timothy 1:9-10; Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:13-14), **redemption** (Ephesians 1:7, 14; Romans 8:18-21) **reconciliation** (Colossians 1:19-20; Ephesians 2:14-18). The reconciliation of Jew and Gentile and their incorporation in one Body is referred to as the ‘mystery of the gospel’ (Ephesians 3:2-6). Election was reinterpreted to include the gentiles.

 \* **Resurrection** (Romans 1:1-4). The resurrection was the attestation of Jesus’ divinity and messiahship (Psalm 2; Acts 4:25; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5). The Western Church has tended to make the cross the central theme of theology and has relegated the resurrection to a sideshow. The Eastern Church, however, has always stressed the importance of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. The Apostle Paul understand Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation to be part of the one great movement that resulted in the salvation of the universe. The Father placed everything under the feet of his Son, Jesus the Messiah (Ephesians 1:15-23; 1 Corinthians 15; Hebrews 2:5-9), and ultimately the universe will be subjected to him (Ephesians 1:9-1: Psalm 110).

**Illustration of the kingdom now and the kingdom coming: D DayTH June, 1944 – V Day, 8th May, 1945.**

**6. Resurrection is the destiny of the Church.** Our salvation is only partial. Scriptures describes us as redeemed (Ephesians 1:7) and adopted into God family (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7, but our redemption and adoption are only complete when our bodies are resurrected (Romans 8:18-25; Ephesians 1:5 and we have a replica of Christ’s resurrection body (Philippians 4:20-21).

**2. THE GOSPEL PREACHED BY THE CHURCH.**

**1. Christ had risen again from the dead** (Acts 2:22-32; 3:17-26; 4:8-12, 33; 10:39-43; 13:37; 17:31; 1Corinthians 15:1-5).

**2. The resurrection confirms that Jesus is the Messiah (see the above)**.

**3. Repentance** (Acts 2:38: 3:19; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30). In the early preaching of the apostles, little was said about Christ dying for sin, but as they grappled with the meaning of the cross it became clear that he had died for sin (1 Peter 2:24; Hebrew 9:26-28).

4. **The Kingdom of God has burst into history and the Spirit is being poured** **out on people** (Acts 2:15-21, 33; Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:26-27; 37:1-14). The Holy Spirit was key in conversion to Christ: new birth (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Titus 2:4-7), baptism (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; acts 1:5; 11:16: 1 Corinthians 12:13), seal (Ephesians 1:13), deposit (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22). Forgiveness and regeneration are the key elements in conversion.

**5**. **Salvation was a gift received by faith (**Acts 16:31; Romans 10:8-13; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7; Galatians 3:12-14; Romans 1:16-17). The message, however, was not one of cheap grace. The paradox was that salvation was a gift that would cost you everything. Faith in Christ and costly obedience went together. There was no qualitative difference between believing in Christ, obeying him and following him in discipleship (Matthew 16:24-27; Luke 9:22-27). For the First Century Christians, following Christ could be a death sentence.

**6. Baptism was the rite that confirmed that the person was a disciple of Christ**. Baptism was part of the conversion package in the early Church. It signified that the old life was over and the new had begun.

**3. THE REVELATION OF THE GOSPEL.**

Paul emphasised that the gospel was God’s revelatory message (1 Corinthians 2:1-16; 2 Corinthians 3:3-6). The ‘gospel’ is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Sharing the gospel is not like a secular marketing drive in which we are obliged to sell a product to reluctant customers. Our mission is ambassadorial. We are representatives of God in foreign soil and are compelled by his love to share his good news of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). The success of the message does not depend on our ‘gift of the gab’, our ‘marketing expertise’, or our personal charisma and forcefulness. God is quite capable of verifying and confirming His own Word. As we share his word, God gives the revelation and authenticates it. Moreover, we don’t have to give people the entire good news of Christ in parrot fashion. One sentence can be enough to open a person’s heart to the grace of God. Next week we’ll watch Jesus sharing the good news with people. On each occasion, he adapted the good news to the unique needs of the individual. He didn’t whip out a booklet like, ‘Knowing God Personally’, and give each person the same salvation formula.

**4. BEAUTIFUL FEET** (Romans 10:14-16; Ephesians 6:15; Matthew 28:18-20). May God give us beautiful feet to take the good news to family, friends, neighbours and the people of Letchworth.

**QUESTION: How do we present the gospel to people in contemporary Britain? This is a predominantly post Christian age and people have no religious vocabulary and a minimal knowledge of Christian truth. Paul adapted his message to the Athenians without compromising its truth. How do we present the gospel today?**

**Supplementary questions:**

**How does the gospel resonate with contemporary issues?**

 **\* Mental Health crisis**

 **\* Identity**

 **\* Purpose of life**

 **\* The need to belong**

 **\* Social Media.**