

Session 1: What is the Gospel?

Definition: gospel (*euangelion*) – Good news

The gospel is generally referred to as the good news about Christ. It is the proclamation that Christ has fully upheld the demands of the law, offered himself as the satisfaction of God's wrath due sin and has taken away our sin through his death upon the cross in our place and his subsequent resurrection conquering sin, death, and the grave.

According to the Apostle Paul, the simplest view of the gospel is *“that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”* (**1 Corinthians 15:3–4**).

The gospel declares that salvation is freely granted to all who repent of sin and believe this good news by faith. It is by faith alone, made possible by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8–9) that a sinner is justified (declared righteous, **Romans 3:21–31**) before the Creator of the universe. This righteousness is not infused but imputed (**Romans 4:22**, credited) to the repenting sinner. It is not a righteousness of one's own but rather an alien righteousness derived from the perfect work of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).

The gospel message is simple but not simplistic. It does not begin with the NT but is the subject of the entirety of Scripture. The gospel message is the aim of God's revelation to man from beginning to end (Genesis–Revelation). It is in this grand narrative of Scripture that we come to know and understand the full mission of God. We must, therefore, begin our understanding of the gospel where God begins His revelation (**Genesis**).

A Concise Definition:

“. . . the good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him. In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust in him. He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice and that God's wrath against us had been exhausted. He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God”¹

“The story of the Bible is the narrative of God coming to be with his people as their Lord, in his control, authority, and presence. After creation and fall, the story is about redemption, and thus about Jesus.”²

In the beginning God . . .

The Bible begins by clearly declaring that God is the initiator and creator of all that exists. His creative authority reveals his ruling authority over cosmic bodies (the heavens) and all that makes life possible here on the earth; the trees, grass, birds, animals, fish, and even all of humanity.

At the peak of creation, in his “finest hour;” God created the human race.

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.””

(Genesis 1:26–28 ESV)

The attention of Scripture then turns to this human race. Chapter 2 zooms in on this significant creation of God. We are informed of a special place which God prepares for his special creation, a garden in the east of Eden. Scripture reveals that this garden is a place where God’s people (Adam & Eve) live in special relationship with him as he promises to provide for their every need.

Sin enters . . .

▪ But . . . rather than being fruitful and multiplying in order to fill the earth with an increasing race of worshippers; Adam and Eve seek to provide for themselves by going beyond the boundaries God had established and trusting in their own way.

- The subsequent result was exactly what God had warned them about. They were separated from their creator (cast out of his special place) and began dying physically. Numerous other consequences follow as a result of sin's entrance to this world. Even nature itself was subjected to sin's affects.

Grace abounds . . .

- Yet, God revealed an immense nature of mercy and grace by still providing for his special creation. He promised that the serpent's head would be crushed by the seed of the woman:

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
(Genesis 3:15 ESV)

- He then provide for man and woman's nakedness by covering them with the skin of an animal.
- The story of Genesis continues to more fully paint this picture of sin's affects on God's creation and God's amazing grace in the midst.
- Adam and Eve's son Cain grows jealous and murders his brother Abel.
- The descendants of Adam and Eve all face death (with the exception of Enoch) which was a curse due to sin.

Sin continues to spread . . .

- Eventually sinfulness grows so pervasive that God himself desires to wipe out all humanity and rid this world of sin once and for all:

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."
(Genesis 6:5-7 ESV)

Where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Rom. 5:20) . . .

- Despite God's intention to meet out justice upon all humanity, he exercised grace in the midst and chose to preserve Noah and his family (though sinners deserving God's wrath):

*"But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD."
(Genesis 6:8 ESV)*

- God graciously preserved this family through his wrath poured out in the flood. The result, however, was the continuation of sin in this world.
- Noah was commanded to serve as a new Adam and be fruitful and fill the earth.

Let's make a name . . .

- Humanity, however, sought to remain solidified and make a name for themselves above any other name.
- They attempted to construct a tower that would gain them a place above God so God responded (in grace) by confounding their languages and forcing them to fulfill his desire for them to fill the earth.

*"Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.' And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the LORD said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.'" So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city."
(Genesis 11:4-8 ESV)*

A new beginning . . .

- Through Noah's descendants, God graciously chose one man through whom he would bring about all his gracious promises to the world, restoring all things to the way they were intended to be.
- God chose a man by the name of Abraham to be the father of his special people who would be led to dwell once again in a place prepared for them by their Creator.

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will

be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
(Genesis 12:1–3 ESV)

- Because of God’s amazing grace, Abraham believed God and was justified (declared righteous).
- Abraham’s descendants would be the people of God who would uniquely display his glory to the nations so that all nations would find blessing.
- Through miraculous events against all odds, God proved himself faithful and capable of carrying out his promises.
- Abraham produced descendants who ultimately, by God’s providential grace, found themselves in Egypt. Here they eventually became slaves for 400 years in order for God to powerfully deliver them revealing his great name.

“Then the LORD said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”
(Genesis 15:13–16 ESV)

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel.”
(Exodus 1:8–12 ESV)

- God led his people out with a mighty hand in order to lead them to the land he had prepared for them. He gave them his law establishing God’s rule over his people.

- Sin's effects, however, upon the hearts of humanity resulted in continual rebellion towards the Creator inviting God's judgment and requiring God's grace for humanity to continue.
- God's people eventually did enter the land which God had prepared, but they never fully obeyed and never fully realized all that God's promises held for his people.

Judges – a cycle of sin . . .

- The book of Judges illustrates the continuous cycle of sin that God's people went through. They grew complacent under God's blessing, rebelled, were judged, cried out to God, and were delivered. The cycle would then start over.
- Throughout this period one truth seems to stand out . . .

*"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
(Judges 17:6 ESV)*

God's rule through God's king . . .

- God's people began to demand a king over them like all the other nations.
- God had promised a king through the prophet Moses,

*""When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, 'I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,' you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother."
(Deuteronomy 17:14–15 ESV)*

- God's people, however, chose a king instead of God rather than a king under God. This led to the people's choice, Saul. Saul was anointed king and eventually forfeited his kingship by rebellion against God.
- God led the judge Samuel to anoint David as king instead of Saul. David served as a picture of the ultimate king that would rule on the throne forever.
- The well known story of David and Goliath serves as a paradigm for the

coming Messiah who would deliver his people from spiritual bondage and establish an eternal kingdom.

In this story, David serves as the anointed king who has yet to ascend the throne yet goes against the enemy of God's people while the people of God stand off in the distance unwilling and unable to gain the victory for themselves. David, though historical, serves as a type of Christ foreshadowing what Christ would accomplish.

- Under the reign of David and Solomon God's people experience in part the kingdom of God. They are living as God's special people in the land that God had prepared for them with God's king ruling over them.
- This reality was only a shadow of what was to come and was short lived. Yet, God renewed his promise to his people through David,

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall 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."

(2 Samuel 7:12-13 ESV)

- This promise is the promise to Abraham renewed and points to a king who would rule forever – Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).

Sin still reigns . . .

- After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom was divided (see Gen. 11). God's people continued to live in rebellion and chase after other God's so God's judgment came upon them once again.
- The prophets spoke messages of warning and repentance but the people would not hear and obey. In his justice, God sent judgment upon his people removing them from the place he had prepared for them. Like Adam, they were exiled from God's special place.
- In the midst of judgment, God spoke words of hope and promise. He would remain faithful even though his people would not. He told them of a day when he would write his law upon their hearts so that they would follow him,

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”
 (Jeremiah 31:31–34 ESV)

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field abundant, that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways, and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominations. It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

“Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. And the land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. And they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations that are left all around you shall know that I am the LORD; I

have rebuilt the ruined places and replanted that which was desolate. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.”
(Ezekiel 36:22–36 ESV)

- God later restored his people to the land by his grace but the return was not all that was expected. It still fell short of the promises. And as usual, God’s people continued to live in rebellion. God once again sent judgment upon his people that they might wake up and see their plight. This time the judgment was a famine of his word. God ceased speaking to his people through the prophets for 400 years.

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.”
(Amos 8:11–12 ESV)

The Word of God . . .

- After a long period of silence, God spoke! This time in a more profound way,

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”
(Hebrews 1:1–4 ESV)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
(John 1:1, 14 ESV)

- By his works, Jesus revealed the undoing of the effects of sin. He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, etc.

"The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.""
(Luke 7:18–23 ESV)

- By his sinlessness, he fulfill the demands of the law making him the perfect representative of humanity. Where Adam and Israel failed, Christ prevailed.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."
(Matthew 5:17–19 ESV)

- Having lived a perfect, sinless life; Christ offered himself as the sacrifice for the sins of, not just Israel, but of the world. Upon the cross he fully satisfied the just wrath of God due sinners and provided forgiveness of sins.

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."
(Romans 3:21–26 ESV)

- By his resurrection, he proved God's approval and conquered sin, death, and the grave. The serpent's head was crushed.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"
(1 Peter 1:3 ESV)

"When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."
(1 Corinthians 15:54–57 ESV)

- All who repent of sin and believe the good news about Christ experience God's gracious gift of salvation, freedom from God's wrath, the forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation with our Creator.

"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
(Acts 2:37–38 ESV)

"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,"
(Acts 3:19 ESV)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,"
(Acts 17:30 ESV)

"because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.""
(Romans 10:9–11 ESV)

- Today, God's people (the Church) continue to proclaim this message as the means of God restoring his kingdom in all its fullness until the day when he returns and fully and finally eradicates sin and makes all things as they were originally intended. This includes the redemption of all creation as well as the bodies of all believers.

¹ Dever, Mark; *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism*, p. 43.

² Frame, John; *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, p. 273.