

Summary

The gospel is unchanged: Christ died for our sins, was raised, and offers reconciliation and hope. It must be preached and embraced, as Paul declared.

Prayer

Dear Father,

I thank you for your mercy extended to me so generously and for your love poured out on me so lavishly. You have forgiven my sin, the memory of which is painful to me, and reconciled me to yourself without fear. You have caused me to walk in the ways of righteousness, peace and joy.

Accept my thanksgiving and praise in Jesus' wonderful name.

Amen.

Song *by K Getty and S Townend*

1. In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace when fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all, here in the love of Christ I stand
2. In Christ alone, who took on flesh, fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live
3. There in the ground, His body lay, Light of the world, by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave, He rose again
And as He stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ
4. No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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Scripture

- Isaiah 53:1-6
- Colossians 1:15-23

Message “The Gospel”

The primary purpose of the church today, as it always has been, is to preach the gospel. “Woe to me” said Paul “if I do not preach the gospel!”¹ Paul wrote over and over again that he placed great importance on the gospel that he preached, “my gospel”.²

It makes for a good group study, or subject for discussion: “What is the gospel?” Well that’s the question we’ll address today.

The great evangelists of past and present preached the gospel. That’s generally agreed on, but what great variety there is and was in their messages. Jesus preached the gospel, summarised in the Scriptures as “repent for the Kingdom of God is near”, but how varied were his communications with individuals and groups.

Obviously the impact of the gospel reaches far and wide, but there is a primary component which has remained unchanged over the life of the Christian church. And it is this component that needs to be repeated not just for the purpose of evangelism and persuasion of the unbeliever, but as a reminder to ourselves of what is our foundation.

Paul provides an explicit definition of gospel in his first letter to the church at Corinth. He says “the gospel I preached to you... : 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”³

Christ died for our sins. But death could not hold him down. He came back to life, in accordance with what was written about him.

Humanity has a major problem, the elephant in the room that is persistently ignored, encapsulated in one little word, sin. And it took a long term plan by the Living God, beyond our understanding but signed off before the foundation of the world⁴, starting with the choosing of a man and then a nation⁵ to get humanity to understand what the problem was, then to come personally and deal with it comprehensively. And to triumphantly declare “It is finished”, ratified by the resurrection. Then having completed the work, he invites all who want to to access the benefits of what he did, as we used to sing: “Whosoever will may come.”⁶

The message hasn’t changed over time. GPS, 65" smart TVs, ipads, AI and \$3,000 iphones hasn’t changed that message. The sexual revolution, gender fluidity, cost of living, renewables, climate change and instant everything hasn’t changed that message. Reconciliation with the living God and the offer of an abundant life resulting from the work of that barbaric cross “towering o’er the wrecks of time”⁷ is still the same and is still available and is still effective. The message hasn’t changed. It’s importance and relevance hasn’t changed. There’s no use-by date.

¹ 1 Corinthians 9:16

² Romans 2:16; Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Gal 1:11; 1 Timothy 1:11; 2 Timothy 2:8

³ 1 Corinthians 15:1,3-4

⁴ Ephesians 1:4

⁵ Deuteronomy 7:7

⁶ Revelation 22:17

⁷ “In the cross of Christ I glory”, by John Bowring (AHB 265)

The Gospel

Paul provides another definition of the gospel in his letter to the Colossians. "This is the gospel" he states⁸. This definition is more expansive than that referred to earlier in 1 Corinthians. This time he begins with the supremacy of Christ who is "the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy"⁹. Through Christ, Paul says, everything is reconciled to himself. Jesus Christ has made peace through his blood shed on the cross, a peace that is available to all. The sin elephant (ie it's a big problem) is altogether dealt with by the one who is supreme.

Paul then goes on to describe the change that takes place in the life of the person who accepts the "whosoever will" invitation – you. Previously there was alienation and enmity between God and you, but now there is reconciliation, a ministry that extends beyond just you and God but between you and others as the Scriptures make clear elsewhere¹⁰. And God's desire and pursuit is to present you holy in his sight, walking in his ways, free from accusation and condemnation, subject to your ongoing confidence in Christ alone. He facilitates the way of goodness, of peace, of joy and righteousness in the Holy Spirit.

The last element Paul refers to in this Colossian definition of the gospel is hope. The gospel gives hope in an otherwise hopeless world. A key element in the prevention of suicide is to have hope. The gospel gives it. Free. Hope based on the supremacy of Christ and reconciliation with the Living God; something to live for. Hope beyond death and the grave.

Then Paul makes the confident assertion: This is the gospel! It's good news. Embrace it. For those who have responsibility to preach, preach it. Like Paul, become its servant.

Thank God for the gospel.

Prayers for suffering Christians: *from Barnabas Prayer for 6/10/24*

Lord Jesus, help us to remember those called to lead your Church throughout the world, especially those serving in contexts of persecution or severe economic hardship. We thank you for their faithfulness in obeying their Divine calling and pray that you will ease their burden by surrounding them with godly servants to support them.

Please enable their teaching and spiritual counsel to build your Church as they trust you.

We ask you to cause the Word of Christ to dwell in them richly by faith, to use them to make the Gospel flourish and to build Your Kingdom, for we ask in your precious Name. (Hebrews 13:7; Colossians 3:16)

HYMN: (MHB 317) *by Philip P Bliss*

1. "Whosoever heareth," shout, shout the sound!
Spread the blessed tidings all the world around;
Tell the joyful news wherever man is found,
"Whosoever will may come."

⁸ Colossians 1:23 (NIV)

⁹ Colossians 1:18

¹⁰ E.G. 2 Corinthian 5:18

The Gospel

*Whosoever will, whosoever will!
Send the proclamation over vale and hill;
'Tis a loving Father calls the wanderer home.
"Whosoever will may come."*

2. Whosoever cometh need not delay,
Now the door is open, enter while you may;
Jesus is the true, the only Living Way:
"Whosoever will may come."
3. "Whosoever will," the promise is secure;
"Whosoever will," forever must endure;
"Whosoever will," 'tis life forever more;
"Whosoever will may come."

Benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.

This service was prepared by Warren Mack for HopeNet SA