

The Gospel:
The Doctrine of First Importance
In Its Concise and Broader Contexts

Introduction

- The first four books of the NT are called gospels
- It gives the impression that there are four gospel accounts
- We need to recognize that, in the original Greek text, the proper heading is, for example, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” etc.
- So, there is only one gospel, according to different evangelists

The Term Gospel

- The term “gospel” derives from the Anglo-Saxon term “godspell,” meaning “good news”
- The Greek word *euangelion* (gospel) and its verb form *euangelizomai* (evangelize) or “speak good news” together occur more than 130 times in the NT
- A gospel was always a message of good news, whether used in a military, imperial, or religious sense
- The gospel that Jesus proclaimed was no different. It was a message that Jesus the Messianic King had come to establish God’s kingdom on earth and forgive people through his own substitutionary life, death, and resurrection, thereby qualifying them to inherit God’s kingdom

The Term Gospel

- Neither Jesus nor the apostles coined the term “**gospel.**” It was commonly used as part of the Roman system of emperor worship, in which the announcement of the “good news” of a royal heir’s birth or a new emperor’s accession to the throne
- The Septuagint translates the terms *euangelion* (gospel) and *euangelizomai* (evangelize or speak good news) from the Hebrew root **basar**
- The verb **basar** refers to “proclaim good news,” such as the birth of a child (Jer 20:15), the choice of a king (1 Kgs 1:42), or a military victory (1 Sam 31:9)

The Gospel According to Isaiah

- The most important passages in the OT for the NT usage of “gospel” occur in Isa 40-66
- Two important passages:
- You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” (40:9)
- How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (52:7)

The Gospel According to Isaiah

- In both passages, a messenger bringing “good news” announces that God is coming to Jerusalem as a victorious king to deliver his people from Babylon’s oppression
- In both of these passages, the message of the “evangelizer” is that, despite the power of the enemy, it is God alone who rules: “Here is your God!” (Isa 40:9) and “Your God reigns!” (52:7)
- Deliverance was undeserved, and they were saved by God’s grace

The Gospel According to Isaiah

- Due to sin, God promises that he will clothe his people in a righteousness that is not their own (61:10-11), when they come to him in faith and repentance (55:1, 7)
- God determines that the punishment for his people's sin will be executed, not on them, but on a divine servant-king appointed to be their substitute (Isa 52:13-53:12)
- Isa 52:13 and 61:1 identify this servant and king as the Messiah, with divine attributes (cf. Phil 2:9-11)

The Gospel According to Isaiah

- This servant-king will be:
 - Pierced for their transgressions (53:5)
 - He will bear their iniquities, make a sin offering, and justify many (53:10-11)
 - He will die, be buried, but will see the light of life (53:11)
 - He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom (9:7)

The Gospel Fulfilled by Jesus

- The earliest content of the gospel in the NT is spelled out in Mk 1:15:
- “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the **good news!**”
- The good news is that the long-awaited kingdom of God, has arrived
- This is in fulfilment of God’s promise to David:
- “¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12-13)
- This is pointing to Jesus, “the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1)

The Gospel Fulfilled by Jesus

- In Lu 4:18-19, Jesus cites Isa 61:
- ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”

The Gospel Fulfilled by Jesus

- The essence of Jesus' preaching through the first stage of his public ministry is stated in his announcement:
- ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the **good news!**" (Mk 1:14-15)
- The good news Jesus announced is just what Isaiah prophesied that God inaugurates his kingdom on earth in the Messiah-King, Jesus Christ
- The spiritually poor can enter the KoG by God's grace and the work of the servant-king standing in their place

The Gospel According to Paul

- Paul received the gospel by revelation from Jesus himself (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 15:3) and it was not subject to human judgment but carried in itself all divine authority (Gal 1:15-17)
- According to Paul, the good news that focuses on Jesus and the cross was anticipated two millennia earlier in the promises given to Abraham:
- ⁷ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. ⁸ Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you” (Gal 3:7-8)

The Gospel According to Paul

- Paul declares the concise gospel in these verses:
- “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4)
- ¹⁶ “For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the **gospel** the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (Rom 1:16-17)

The Broader Context

- The gospel is tied to the Bible's main storyline
- God is sovereign, who made the universe, including mankind
- Adam and Eve rebelled and banished from the garden and the tree of life
- But God, out of love, takes the initiative and prepares for the coming of his son by raising up a nation who, by covenant promises, temple worship, system of sacrifice and of priesthood, are taught by prophets of what God is planning
- In the fullness of time his Son comes and takes on human nature
- In first instance, he comes not to judge but to save by dying on the cross for his people, rises from the dead, and sends the Holy Spirit as a down payment and guarantee of the eternal bliss to come in a new heaven and a new earth

Conclusion

- Paul views the concise gospel as centering on Jesus Christ and what God has done through him
- The essential points of the gospel include Jesus as the Son of God, his genuine humanity, his death for our sins, his burial, resurrection, subsequent appearances, and future coming in judgment that one is justified by faith in his gracious works
- All the prophets of the OT point to Jesus as the Messiah and coming King: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lu 24:27)
- In proclaiming the gospel, the message is clear: through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah-King, there is righteousness, forgiveness of sin, and the inheritance of God’s kingdom for any sinner who will trust in him

Call for a Response

- Jesus preached, “Repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1:15). This is a call for a response
- Paul declared that sinners who receive Jesus’ sacrifice of atonement through faith are justified—declared to be righteousness (Rom 3:21-26)
- To have faith in Jesus is to trust God as completely as Abraham did (Rom 4:21)
- Faith is to trust Jesus, to believe in him, to rely on him alone for salvation

Discipleship Pointers

- Christians have a unified and consistent message to proclaim to the nations
- “The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world” (Lausanne Covenant 1974)
- Our understanding of the gospel has massive implications for Christian discipleship

Implications

- “The focus on the gospel presupposes a certain way of reading the Bible. There are those people who treat the Bible as a little narrow piece that gets you into the kingdom. Then come discipleship and training, which are detached from the gospel. In the Bible itself, the gospel is the big thing. The gospel is first and foremost what God has done and is doing in Christ Jesus, supremely through his death, resurrection, ascension, session at the Father’s right-hand, continuing to his return, the restoration of all things, the new heaven and the new earth, all grounded on the cross and the resurrection (1 Cor 15; Gal 3:7-9). This is very massive in its implications and bearings. From this come Christian ethics, Christian worldview, and frames of reference on how the church relates to culture. Focus on the gospel in the comprehensive sense is central to the Bible itself” (D A Carson 2013).

The Gospel in Asia

- “Theology in Asia has been taught by Western missionaries. The West has its own theological formulations derived out of its own cultural background—Calvinism, Arminianism, death of God, etc. Yet in Asia the circumstances facing Christians differ from those in the West. Asian Christians must make their theologies relevant to their living situations in Asia. Some of the main issues that Asian Christians face today are communism, poverty, suffering, war, idolatry, demon possession, bribery, and cheating” (Ro 2001, 108).

The Gospel in Asia

- “Up to this point, comparatively little has been produced in terms of authentic Asian theological thinking that addresses directly and powerfully the big questions posed by culture and context in Asia. Because of the overwhelming power and supposedly superiority of western culture in much of 19th and 20th centuries, many non-western Christians lost confidence in their own cultures, and sought identities in western culture” (Hwa Yung, *Mission Round Table*, [2008]: 11).

MANGOES OR BANANAS?

WESTERN AND ASIAN THEOLOGY

- Fixed grand theory that is acultural and ahistorical
- Abstract and rationalistic
- Naturalistic worldview
- Unengaged with lived experiences
- Weak sense of mission
- Holistic and does not dichotomize spiritual and physical
- Inculturated in faith and practice
- Recognizes supernatural elements
- Incarnational
- Missional

The Gospel in Asia

- A holistic gospel—true Christianity is not Platonic. There is no separation between the physical and spiritual, secular and sacred. The gospel is holistic because of the doctrines of creation and redemption in the Bible
- A supernatural gospel—the type of Christianity tends to be Pentecostal or charismatic, that takes healing, deliverance from demonic powers and spiritual gifts seriously

The Gospel in Asia

- An inculturated gospel—there is a need to clothe the gospel we preach in the language and thought patterns of Asia. Does it make sense to people living in tropical SE Asia to sing ‘Summer and winter, and spring time and harvest’? What does Jn 3:16 communicate to a Buddhist, who has no concept of God? What does “love” mean to him? What does “eternal life” mean to him?
- An incarnated gospel—for the gospel to be authentic it must be incarnated into the lives of Asian Christians

The Gospel in Asia

- What can Christians do to make Christianity more naturalized in India?
- Gandhi said, “First, Christians must live more like Jesus
- Second, you practice your religion without toning it down
- Third, you emphasize love and make it your working force, for love is central in Christianity
- Fourth, that you study the non-Christian religions more sympathetically to find the good in them, to have a more sympathetic approach to people”