

What is the Mission of the Church? (Part 2: The Nature of the Gospel)

Mark 1:9-15 (ESV); Pg. 488 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. **11** And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

12 The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. **13** And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

- I. Last week we began to discover together the answer to the question, "What is the mission of the church?" We will continue on that course this week.
 - A. We talked about how the basis of our mission is Christ's universal, all-encompassing authority. Because he has been given all authority in both Heaven and earth, we have a guarantee of support and ultimately of success in the proclamation of his story, the Gospel.
 1. This isn't to suggest that every person alive will one day be saved, or that every person that we share Jesus' story with will accept it.
 2. It means that you and I have a standing commission, both to "go" and to speak in his name because he, in his authority, has commanded us to do so.
 - a) This authorization is not subject to the government of man, or any other human restraint. In fact, the church has always thrived most when it is most severely persecuted (and it still does today!).
 - b) Even in Acts 5, when Peter and John were commanded by the Jewish authorities not to preach in the name of Christ any longer, their response was simply, "We must obey God rather than man."
 - (1) For them, it was a "chain of command" issue. Christ's command to preach trumped any civil order they were given not to do so.
 - (2) They were safe and ultimately supported by God's power and his kingly decree as long as they obeyed. Even if they were beaten or killed, they rested joyfully in the promise that they would be eternally secure with Jesus forevermore. They were, in a way, bulletproof!
 - B. We also spoke about the difference between leading a person to a decision (i.e., to pray a prayer, or join a church, etc.) and making disciples for Christ (teaching people about Jesus: his story, his requirements, how he is glorified, etc.).
 1. We discussed how decisions are based on shifting tastes and attitudes, but discipleship requires daily surrendering more and more to Christ, and ultimately renouncing everything that we are, or desire, to gain him.
 2. Last week I reminded you that Jesus had said "**...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**" (Luke 14:33b)
 - a) This was not to imply that someone who responds to the Gospel must immediately sell their house and car and move to a third world country in order to be counted a true disciple. We would all be found lacking!

- b) It means that the rest of our lives are to be spent regularly dying to ourselves and coming alive to Christ's Lordship and his will for our lives. Nothing is left off the table. He can give and take as he sees fit for our good (our health, wealth, careers, dreams, ambitions - all of it).
 - 3. Therefore in order to be a disciple maker, we must be constantly teaching and encouraging each other (and be willing to be taught and encouraged by each other) to "observe (or obey) all" that Jesus commanded.
 - 4. We also talked about how decision (which is primarily something I do) is inferior to conversion which is something the Holy Spirit accomplishes in me, and often in spite of me. As I said last week, I'd like us to begin to use and ponder the language and concept of conversion more and more at NRLC.
 - C. Lastly, we talked last week about how we not only have the covering of Christ's authority to accomplish our mission, but we also have the assurance of his presence. He said that he would be with us always, to the end of the age. What age? The present age, in which our commission to make disciples of all nations is in full effect. The commission ends when the age ends, and vice-versa.
- II. This week, I want to take a closer look at this marvelous thing we call the Gospel. If you are around North Ridge Life Church for very long, you are going to hear that word...a lot. We make no apologies for that. All of our eggs are in the basket of the gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel. It shapes our doctrine, informs our policy, and clarifies our destiny.
 - A. The gospel is essentially a story that has deep ramifications for every human being since God knelt in the mud to form Adam. This is true whether we believe it or accept. It is true for those who have heard the story and responded to it, as well as those who are living and have died never having heard the story.
 - B. It is a story consisting of four acts (like a play), which I will briefly describe for you:
 - 1. The first act is **Creation**. The first verse of the Bible tells us that God created everything in the beginning. When he was done with each phase of creating, he assessed his work as good, or very good.
 - a) The crowning achievement in the work of creation was the formation of humanity, represented by a man and a woman who, unlike everything else in the cosmos, would bear the image of their maker.
 - b) To the man and the woman were delegated managerial authority. God told them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion..." They could not have been in a better position.
 - 2. But it is in the second act of this play, that drama reveals itself to be tragedy. We call this act "**The Fall**". The man and woman, living in paradise, are beguiled by an enemy who convinces them to reject the maker's authority and grasp for his crown. But in seeking his throne, they abdicate their own.
 - a) The couple is evicted from their home in "paradise on earth" and they, along with all of their descendants (you and I), as well as the entire creation is placed under a curse. Hard work, pain, conflict, disease, loss and finally death will be the only heritage of the once flawless creation.
 - (1) But something amazing happens as God the Judge is doling out righteous punishments to all of the players in this attempted coup: He makes a promise. He says to the one who orchestrated their fall...

- (2) “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.
- b) He is saying that a day is coming when one of the woman’s descendants will deal a fatal blow to the tempter, even though he will temporarily cause injury to his judge. He is saying that things will be put right again!
- c) Act 2 is the longest act in this play, as we see the devastation that unleashed sin works in nations, families, and individuals all the way from Genesis to Malachi. But through prophets, priests and kings, God continues to assure his creation that a day of redemption is approaching.
3. Finally, after centuries of sin wreaking havoc across the span of the globe, we come to the third act of the play; the one we call **Redemption**. The long awaited deliverer finally shows up. But he did so quietly and discretely, born to peasant laborers who are away from home, in a stranger’s barn one night.
- a) The amazing thing about this deliverer is that he was a man descended from the blood of David, Israel’s greatest King. But what only a handful of people knew at the time, what was revealed to them by the Holy Spirit; was that this deliverer was, in fact, the Son of God; equal to God himself!
- (1) But though he was humanly royal, and spiritually divine, his redemption of the race wouldn’t be accomplished by leading military forces, or taking his rightful place on an earthly throne. On the contrary, this King would free his people by willingly paying the full penalty of humanity’s collective guilt, from Adam and Eve, to you and I, and extending to all of our descendants in the future.
- (2) This penalty demanded that the King be brutally tortured, publicly mocked, and finally impaled with spikes through his hands and feet to a cross until he at last breathed his last, crying out, “It is Finished!”. He was indicating that mankind’s massive sin debt, that had so long separated them from God. had been finally paid, perfectly and in full!
- b) But better yet, because he was the righteous Son of God, death could not hold him!
- (1) Three days after his awful crucifixion, the Holy Spirit entered his sealed tomb and raised him back to a brand new kind of life! So Jesus didn’t just forgive us, but he demonstrated his power by defeating our final, most brutal, universal enemy: death itself!
- (2) Paul says that his resurrection is a promissory note, guaranteeing our own resurrection from the dead as well.
4. And last we come to the final act in the long drama; the best one! We call it **New Creation**. It is revealed that as part of our Redeemer’s triumph, he has come, not only to make us new as individuals, but also to remake the entire creation; that as he has redeemed, so will he also restore.
- a) This means new bodies, new desires, and a new kind of government, based perfectly on his justice and righteousness. Though this will not be fully realized until Christ comes again to reign as visible King on planet earth, we are the faithful representatives of our King, empowered by the same

Spirit that raised him from the dead, even now. **Today** we are Christ's ambassadors! What will this "new creation" be like?

- b) **Revelation 21:1 (ESV); Pg. 603** "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." **5** And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

III. So there it is in a nutshell; the Gospel, a story in 4 distinct acts. But now that we know what the gospel basically *is*, we need to consider whether what we are hearing is the gospel or something else (especially in church, or on Christian radio or TV, or the internet)? This is a skill of utmost importance to acquire!

A. The apostle Paul was deadly serious about the purity of what was called the Gospel. He told the church in Galatia, "If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (even if it's an angel preaching it!)."

B. So I'd like to give you 6 quick ways to judge whether what you're being fed is the gospel. I hope you find them as helpful as I have.

1. First, **It's only the gospel if it is laser-focused on the person of Jesus Christ.**

I don't care how many scriptures are quoted in a given message. I don't care how many "holy ghost heebie-jeebies" you claim the message gives you, if the message is not centered on, and anchored in, the redeeming death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ, what you are hearing is absolutely not the gospel of God!

a) The Gospel is not a type of music, or a mere attestation of truthfulness, or a type of church or denomination. It is the testimony of all God has accomplished because of the obedience of his only begotten Son!

b) Paul, the greatest theologian that ever lived, told the Corinthians that he would gladly jettison all the wisdom of the world, because he had determined to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. (1 Cor. 2:2)

2. Second, **It's only the Gospel if it's Biblical.** Now I know that this makes you want to go. "Well, duh, Captain Obvious!" But not so fast!

a) Take a look around you and look at what people freely attach Jesus' name to! Things that have no connection to the written word of God.

(1) How many facebook meme's have commandeered his name and glory in order to guilt you into "liking and sharing", promising that you'd be blessed or make Jesus happy by doing so?

(2) One of the biggest bestseller's for the last few years is based on one woman's claims to have received 365 directly-received revelations from

Jesus so you'll know what he wants you to know. But guess what? Jesus himself has already given you 66 books so you'll know what he wants and thinks. I think we should start there, don't you?

- b) When Christ wanted to confirm his identity to two of his followers on the road to Emmaus the day he was resurrected, he didn't parade his miracles, or some new teaching, he proved his divinity from the Old Testament; "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:27)
3. Third, **It's only the Gospel if it's Historical**. I did not get out of bed this morning to lull you to sleep with philosophical ramblings about the value of Jesus' moral example. I have come to declare that the immaterial God has invaded the real world of time and space, taking on human flesh.
 - a) Somewhere around 33AD in actual human history he was betrayed, killed and buried for the sins of the world. Beyond a shadow of a doubt he was raised from the dead 3 days later by the power of God. 40 days later he ascended to the right hand of his Father in power and glory. Many eyewitnesses saw this happen.
 - b) Those eyewitnesses were so convinced of what they had seen that they spent the remainder of their lives proclaiming it as actual historical fact. In fact, most of them were brutally killed because of their refusal to recant the testimony of what they so thoroughly and completely believed.
 - c) These events are not fantasy, myth, legend, fiction or philosophy. They events that really occurred. And the dung pile of history is littered with untold thousands of attempts to disprove or discredit these events.
4. Fourth, **It's only the Gospel if it's Personal**. I don't mean to suggest that you can have your own private little thing with Jesus. I'm saying that if you're hearing the Gospel, it will have a dramatic effect on you personally.
 - a) It matters little what anyone else says or believes. What matters is the answer to the question Jesus posed to the disciples in Matthew 16, "Who do **you** say that he is?" You must ask yourself the following:
 - b) Is your belief **social**? Do you believe because your friends or family believe? Is your belief **cultural or societal**? Do you believe because it's "the right thing to do"? Is your belief **opportunistic**? Do you believe because you think that's the path to temporal blessings, or your ticket out of hell? Or do you believe that Jesus alone has the words of eternal life, and recognizing that, there's nowhere else for you to turn.
5. Fifth, **It's only the gospel if it's Doctrinal**. The Bible is not some book of pithy sayings collected so that preachers will have some motivational ammunition on Sunday mornings. It is given, 2 Timothy says, to be profitable "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" so that we may be "complete, equipped for every good work". (2 Tim. 3:16)
 - a) The old church confessions called the scriptures (wherein the gospel is contained) "the only rule for faith and life (or faith and practice)". This means the true gospel will always have an ever-deepening impact on what we believe and what we think.

- (1) Christ revealed in God's written word, and not my feelings, opinions, hopes or fears, decides whether I am a sinner, or am redeemed; how I should treat others, and what is acceptable Christian behavior.
- (2) The oft-repeated refrain of our culture is "you can't judge me!" But someone whose life is being transformed by the message of Christ will shut up long enough, and with increasing humility, so that the scriptures to judge them thoroughly and consistently.
- b) I often hear people excuse their nasty behavior by saying, "Well, God knows my heart!" That's true, so if you're living in rebellion to the truths of his Word, that should disturb you and not comfort you.
- 6. Lastly, **It's not the Gospel if it's not *Practical***. It will never be exclusively doctrinal, but also applicable.
 - a) "It has to do with all of life, from our families to our finances, from our schooling to our purity. Our relationships in the church, our ministries of word and deed, our affections and our fears - the Gospel has practical implications for all of these things" -Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary
 - b) The Apostle Paul's usual structure for his letters usually followed this pattern: first half, explain the Gospel; second half, apply it, explaining how it pertains to our day to day lives.
- IV. My prayer is that we will be a church that has highly-developed spiritual senses to discern what is and is not the gospel. I pray that we would be clear in the proclamation of it, as well as the application of it.
 - A. This is not my job or the elder's alone, either! We must **all** become so clear on this all important message so that we can encourage each other to believe it fully and apply it deeply.
 - B. **Ephesians 3:14 (ESV); Pg. 568** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, **16** that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, **21** to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.