

LIVING WATER

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WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS?

by Taylor Hogland

In his opening remarks to the Christians in Rome, Paul made the following statement:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16)

This is one of those passages of Scripture that just rolls off the tongue; it's easy to memorize, it's easy to say — **but what does it mean?** What is the Gospel, exactly? And how does it produce the powerful effect that Paul describes?

The Gospel, in its most general sense, is **a proclamation or message of good news**. But that's still a bit vague. There are many forms of “good news” that we may receive — your doctor may give you good news about a health concern, or your accountant may share some good news about your tax return — but the Good News we're referring to here is entirely distinct from such ordinary forms of “good news”. So let's get a bit more precise.

The Good News that Paul is referring to is distinct first & foremost in its **source** — **in who the message is from**. It's not a good report from your doctor or accountant or any other person for that matter, but **a message directly from God Himself** — and not only a message, but a **gift** (Eph 2:8).

Having established the source of the message, the next question concerns its **content** — **what does the message say?** What is this gift from God, exactly?

The Gospel message is, at its core, **the Divine answer to a human need**; it is God's solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem. But before we can truly appreciate the answer, we must fully grasp the problem. The problem, in a word, is **sin**. And sin is problematic for a great number of reasons, but the ultimate problem it presents is that it separates us from God:

“Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” (Isa 59:2)

Sin is **the ultimate tragedy** — for all the suffering we may go through in our lives, there can be no greater pain than the pain of spiritual death. A creature without his or her Creator is a creature without purpose, without direction, and without hope — it is to be lost in every sense of the word, it is to be dead before you have even died. In this horrible state of separation, any joy we may experience is fleeting, and any suffering we endure is only a foretaste of what is to come. As bleak as that may sound, it is by no means an overstatement — we cannot possibly overstate the magnitude of this problem, a problem that drove Paul to despair in (Rom 7:24): ***“Wretched man that I am!”*** he cries, ***“Who will deliver me from this body of death?”***

There is far more that can be said about the problem of sin, but for now let us just establish one more key feature of it.

The problem of sin is not something that only pertains to a small minority of criminals, it is a problem that pertains to each and every single one of us — **“For there is no distinction:”** Paul writes, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom 3:22-23). The problem of sin would be tragic enough if it only applied to a fraction of humanity, yet this tragedy applies to the whole. If each one of us took our own individual track-record, our lifespan’s worth of choices, and if we weighed ourselves in the balances of God’s justice, the result would be devastating — **“no human being will be justified in his sight”** (Rom 3:20).

Thus we have our problem, and our problem results in our need — our need for **remedy, resolution, and reconciliation.**

We established previously that the Gospel is the Divine answer to a human need — now that we’ve stated our need, **what then is God’s answer?**

God’s answer to our need is, in a word, **Christ** — the entire world stands guilty and separated from God, and yet **“in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them”** (2 Cor 5:19). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is blameless, sinless, and faultless in every way, suffered and died in our place **“so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”** (2 Cor 5:21).

This is not something to treat lightly. Remember, we deserved **punishment**, and yet God gave us a **propitiation** (Rom 3:25) — He gave us His Son, who made amends on our behalf. This is Grace in every sense of the word — we were due one thing, and yet we received something else. We deserved death, and yet we’ve received life. This is not simply “good news”, it the best news that there is — a gift like no other. To which we say (borrowing from 2 Cor 9:15): **“Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!”**

Thus we have the Good News, the Gospel, **the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.** But that leaves us with one final question — **who are those who believe?** If this gift of salvation belongs to everyone who believes, we must be sure that we fully comprehend what it means to believe. To answer this question, we will look no further than to the very first Gospel sermon of all time — Peter’s sermon in Acts 2.

Just prior to this sermon, God’s long-awaited plan of salvation had been brought to completion — Jesus had been crucified, raised from the dead, and then ascended into heaven before the very eyes of his disciples (Acts 1). There was now a Gospel to preach, and Peter was tasked with preaching it for the very first time. What followed was absolutely remarkable.

After Peter established that (1) Jesus was in fact the Christ and that (2) those in attendance were guilty of sin, **those who heard it accepted it as being true** — in fact, they were so moved with conviction and grief that **“they were cut to the heart”** (Acts 2:37).

But the sermon was not finished — the Gospel message had not yet been fully spoken. They ask Peter and his fellow apostles, **“Brothers, what shall we do?”** (v37), to which Peter responds:

“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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off...” (v38-39)

This is the Good News, the Plan of Salvation, the Eternal Scheme of Redemption. **Man needed, and God answered.** And His answer is the same now as it was then — the same **“promise”** (v39) and **“gift”** (v38) that was extended to Peter’s believing audience is extended to each and every one of us who believe today. They asked **“what shall we do?”** — Peter gave them their answer, and the following verses give us their response. The only question that remains is this: **what will you do? How will you respond to the Good News?**