

Introduction

- **Colossians 1:15-23** (Page 66 in lent guide).
- **Pray.**

“Preach the gospel, and when necessary, use words.”

Anyone heard this quote before? It's fairly popular in certain Christian circles.

- We don't actually know where the quote comes from.
- It often gets attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, but all indicators are that he didn't actually say it.

Some people absolutely love the quote. And there's some reasons for that.

- They argue, like we saw all last week, that one of the greatest resources we have at our disposal to help others know Jesus is our lives...is how we live.
- That, as others say – “the only Bible our neighbor might read is our lives.”
- And there's a lot of truth to that – demonstrating the gospel is vitally important.
 - Demonstrating the gospel shows people we're not just blowing smoke when we talk about Jesus.
 - And it often leads to opportunities to talk about Jesus.

BUT while the quote can be helpful...it's not totally correct. Because while demonstrating the gospel is very important, it isn't complete by itself.

I mean, it's not as if you can just mow your neighbor's grass every week for a year, and one day they're gonna see you doing it and go, “you know what? I think, based on the way they're cutting that grass, I'm beginning to think that Jesus of Nazareth might just be the king of the world, and I think I should give my life to him.”

That's not how it works, right?

- At some point, if you want someone to know the good news of Jesus, you will have to actually talk to them.
- We can't just love them and serve them and then cross our fingers – please ask me about Jesus. Please ask me about Jesus.

At some point we've got to do what we'll talk about today – we've got to actually **proclaim the gospel.**

So how do we do that? How do we proclaim the gospel? How do we share the good news of Jesus?

False Gospels

Well it seems appropriate to start by making sure we're all clear on what the good news is.

Before we get into how to proclaim the gospel, I think it'd be worth us making sure we're on the same page of what “the gospel” actually means.

Because if you get the gospel wrong, you're going to proclaim it wrong.

And unfortunately there's a lot of false gospels floating around in the world today.

- There's ways, in an effort to "win people to Jesus" that the church has shifted or watered down or tried to make the gospel more palpable/digestible for those who are not Christians.
- The problem is though, when we strip down parts of this gospel message, we are left with no gospel at all.
- We are left with what can only be referred to as "false gospels".

My intent in bringing these up is that you can be aware of them so that you can be abundantly clear in how you proclaim the true gospel.

1. The Love Gospel

This tends to be the most popular in more progressive cities or among more progressive generations. Most notably millennials and later.

This gospel sounds something like this:

- Jesus was a "friend of sinners" – if you read the gospels he was always eating with, loving, serving those who were marginalized and oppressed.
- Jesus loves all of us. After all, God is love.
- So He stands with open arms ready to welcome you and love you and serve you wherever you are, whoever you are, and whatever it is you have done or still do.

This type of gospel is seen most prominently in the recent "He Gets Us" ads that ran during the super bowl.

- In the ad, if you didn't see it, it shows a bunch of different provocative scenes of feet washing – like a pastor washing the feet of a prostitute, or a Christian washing the feet of a girl at the abortion clinic.
- *And then it concluded with this message – "Jesus Didn't Teach Hate."*
- That is the "love" gospel.

Yes things may be broken, but you're not, you've just gone a bit astray. At your core you're good, and Jesus stands ready with open arms to welcome you back to Him.

Now, there are some elements of truth here:

- Jesus did spend much of his ministry loving and serving for the poor and the marginalized.
- Jesus does welcome all who come to Him with open arms.

But where this gospel goes wrong, is that it co-opts God's definition of love for the modern day definition of love which is really just a synonym for approval and tolerance.

So when we preach and proclaim this gospel – "God loves you! He welcomes you with open arms!" The filter that it gets run through in our cultural moment is – "He therefore approves everything I do and everything I am. After all, that's what love means right?"

But that's not love according to the Scriptures. God's love according to the Scriptures does not delight in wrongdoing – meaning God welcomes us as we are (sinners, broken, rebellious), but then His love transforms us into what we are meant to be, which is holy, blameless, and righteous according to God's standard.

What the proclamation of a love gospel misses is the reality of what entering God's Kingdom requires. That entrance into the kingdom of God does not come without repentance of sin and surrender to the King.

So we cannot and must not proclaim a gospel that does not call people to what Jesus called people to – lay down your life (desires, wants, preferences, sin), repent, and follow Him.

And if we're not careful, we can preach a gospel that promises and offers all of the benefits of Jesus' kingdom, without any of the surrender He requires to enter it.

2. The Blessings Gospel

Some would call this the “prosperity gospel.” I’m not a big fan of that term because it tends to be when we hear the prosperity gospel, we think of its most extreme forms.

Dr. Kate Bowler, a professor at Duke, has dedicated her career to tracking the history of the prosperity gospel in America. And she says that most people when they think of the prosperity gospel think of what she calls “Hard Prosperity”.

- This would be the televangelists like Creflo Dollar or Kenneth Copeland.
- More of the traditional or extreme forms – “Send us \$100 and God will give you \$100,000.”

But she argues much more sneaky and dangerous is what she calls “The Soft Prosperity Gospel.”

- It sounds something like this – We believe that, as part of Christ's work of salvation, it is the Father's will for believers to become whole, healthy, and successful in all areas of life: including Spiritual, Mental & Emotional, Physical, and Financial. (which by the way comes word for word from Mike Todd's church in Tulsa, Oklahoma)
- Or to quote Joel Osteen, who leads the largest church in America – “God wants you to live in abundance. He wants to give you the desires of your heart...God is turning things around in your favor...God wants to increase you financially, by giving you promotions, fresh ideas and creativity.”

Now again, let me point out some parts of this that are true...

- Yes we worship and follow a loving God who is for you, even through hardship.
- Yes, God can do miracles.
- Yes, God does want to see his people flourish.

But let me be abundantly clear – This is simply not the gospel that Jesus preached and the exact opposite of the life that Jesus lived.

- Sets people up for disillusionment.
 - Come to Jesus and He'll heal your anxiety, fix your depression, and better your circumstances...
 - Tell that to Paul and the rest of the martyrs in the early church who died for Jesus.
 - “The best is yet to come!”
 - Tell that to Jesus Himself, who went to the cross.
- I agree the best is yet to come...
 - If by “best” you mean becoming a person of love as defined by Jesus primarily through suffering.
 - And if by “yet to come” you mean not in this life but in life forever with God.
 - Then that statement is 100% true.
- But if by “the best” you mean my physical, emotional, financial health and “yet to come” you mean at some point between now and death – **that is not grounded in reality or the Scriptures.**
 - Life does not go upwards and to the right.
 - And our expectation that it does, and our belief in this false gospel – leads to all sorts of disillusionment.

And if you believe this gospel, the gospel you will preach will sound no different than an alternative way of “Jesus self-improvement.”

- Feeling anxious or depressed? Have you tried Jesus?

- Feeling lonely? Jesus will never leave you or forsake you!

What's missing in these proclamations of the gospel?

- There's no call to surrender to Christ.
- To bring yourself up under his rule and his reign.
- No "sell all you have and follow me."
- No, to quote Jesus in Matt 16 – "Take up your cross, ready to die, and follow me."

3. The Decision Gospel

This is what Dr. Gerry Breshears calls the "John 3:16 Gospel". It sounds something like this:

- You are a sinner going to hell.
- God loves you.
- Jesus died on the cross for your sins.
- If you believe in Him, you will live forever with God.

Now, do we believe all of those things? Yes. Absolutely.

- Do we believe we are sinners? Of course.
- Did Jesus die on the cross for sins? Yes.
- Do we believe that by faith we will live forever with God? For sure.

The problem is not that this decision gospel is wrong, it's just that it's, at its most basic form, incomplete. It has created a sort of "salvation by minimum entrance requirements."

It turns salvation into a transactional event about getting someone out of hell and into heaven, rather than the NT picture of salvation as an all of life reorientation, not to get us into heaven, but to get heaven into us.

It makes Christianity about praying a prayer so you can get eternal life with God. While totally missing that Jesus himself defines eternal life in John 17:3 as knowing (that is walking with) God. And that begins, not when we die, but here and now as we reorient our entire lives around Christ and His ways.

The gospel Jesus preached is not simply – pray a prayer, raise a hand, get converted – and you're good to go. It's an all of life surrender to disciple under King Jesus, to surrender to His Kingdom and His rule and reign.

John Ortberg – "In this way of thinking about salvation, the goal is to get from down here, to up there. About how to know for sure that you're heading to 'the good place'. It usually involves praying a specific prayer, believing a set of doctrines about God, and other things that make someone a 'Christian'. Ironically, it does not necessarily involve a life of apprenticeship to Jesus."

So what happens is that when this becomes the gospel we proclaim – the gospel of "make a decision and you get to go to heaven" – we end up with (as one pastor says) – **consumers of Jesus' merit rather than disciples of Jesus' way.**

To be "saved", to become a Christian, to receive Christ's work on the cross on your behalf, cannot be separated from the invitation to follow in the way of Jesus.

And we preach a half-gospel when our entire focus is on getting someone to "pray a prayer" or "make a decision".

Colossians 1 + The Four-Part Story

Now that I've sufficiently either upset you or terrified you...one of the two. Let me help you see what the Scriptures say "the gospel" actually is. If the call is to proclaim the gospel, what is the gospel?

That's where Colossians 1 is going to be so helpful for us. Colossians 1:15-23 is a really clear summary, from Paul, of what we mean when we say "the gospel". Or "the good news of Jesus Christ".

In fact, in the NIV translation of the passage, he wraps up this section by saying this in v23 – **"This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."**

- Meaning – everything I just laid out for you in the preceding verses is my summary of "the gospel" – or "good news" – of Jesus we are called to proclaim to the world.

So what is this gospel? I think you can break down this text, Paul's summary of the gospel, into 4 parts.

The framework is this – **Creation // Fall // Redemption // Restoration.**

Creation

- **You were made to live with God in His Kingdom.**

Col 1:15-18

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The gospel of Jesus starts, not with sin, or with bad news, but with good news. With creation.

With a picture of the way that the world is supposed to be.

All things, according to Paul, are created and were *meant to exist* **through** Jesus, **for** Jesus, **under** Jesus (meaning underneath His rule and reign, aka in His Kingdom) and **in** Jesus (held together by Him.)

This includes thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities (that is both the spiritual world and the physical world).

AND...this includes you and me.

We were meant to exist and live through Jesus, for Jesus, under the reign of Jesus, and in relationship with Jesus.

But then it goes wrong...

Fall

- **Sin has separated you from God, and now you live in the kingdom of darkness.**

The fall is the summary idea that something has gone wrong with us and with the world.

Col 1:19-22a

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death,

“You who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.”

That’s the Bible’s description of all of us apart from Jesus.

- Alienated – separated from God
- Hostile – not children of God, but enemies of God. Under just and righteous wrath and condemnation.
- Doing evil deeds – full of wickedness and rebellion in how we live our lives.

So we who were meant to live in intimacy and closeness and relationship with God, are now unholy because of sin, and therefore cannot live with a holy God.

That’s the Fall.

All of creation, meant to be through, for, under and in Jesus is now not.

- We do not live through Jesus, we live through our own strength and power.
- We do not live for Jesus, we live for our wants and our whims and our desires.
- We do not live under the reign of Jesus, we try to be our own rulers and gods.
- We do not live in relationship with Jesus, we are separated from Him and his enemies.

But it doesn’t end there. God has done something about that...

Redemption

- Christ has come, died for your sin, risen to give you life, and through surrender to Him you can be transferred into the kingdom of God.

Col 1:19-23

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

Because the world is broken and we are broken, something has to, in the bible’s language, “save” us. The world can’t go on as it is – something has to fix it.

As Christians, we believe that “something” is a “someone” and his name is Jesus.

- So we are separated from God because of sin.
- Jesus enters into humanity, goes to the cross, takes God’s wrath for sin and sinners onto himself and dies.
- And yet (spoiler alert for next week) rises again.
- So in the great exchange, the ultimate unfair trade – Jesus takes our sin and death, and gives us His righteousness and His life.
- God views us as He views His Son Jesus – holy, blameless, and above reproach.
- We are reconciled to God...brought back into relationship with Him... under his rule and reign.
- Transferred, as Paul puts it in earlier in v13 – from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son!

BUT!! Reconciliation not just for us, for the whole creation!

God has a bigger plan of redemption than just us. He's redeeming the whole world. What is broken in creation – injustice, poverty, sickness, war, mourning and sorrow – creation itself is being redeemed by God.

Leading ultimately to...

Restoration

- **One day that kingdom will come in full, and all who trust in Jesus, along with His creation, will be made new.**

So though we are saved from the **penalty** of sin, are being saved from the **power** of sin, one day we will be saved from the **presence** of sin.

Everything that is broken in us and around us is being and will continue to be made new through Christ. And one day that newness will reach its fullness – that glorious day the Scriptures promise where Christ returns and ushers in the fullness of His Kingdom.

And all who trust in Christ will experience forever no more mourning, crying, pain, sin, sickness, strive – but will be at home in the presence of God, where we were created to be, forever.

Creation // Fall // Redemption // Restoration.

That is the gospel.

Proclaiming the Gospel

SO...To proclaim the gospel then, very simply is to declare – **Jesus is ushering in the Kingdom of God, bringing redemption and reconciliation to what is broken in us and the world, so surrender your whole self to Him.**

And this is not just Paul's language for the gospel, this is Jesus' language for the gospel.

Mark 1:14 - 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 (surrender) and believe in the gospel."

To Jesus, proclaiming the gospel is declaring the good news of His arriving Kingdom – a kingdom of redemption and reconciliation, for all who repent and turn to Him by faith.

So to proclaim the gospel is not:

- **Offering Jesus as one solution among many by which people can go to the after life.**
- **Declaring a secularized love of God that people can embrace without repentance and surrender.**
- **Offering Jesus as a sort of therapeutic balm or pill for the struggles of this life.**
- **Inviting people to pray a prayer, make a decision, and go about the rest of their lives with a "get out of hell free" card.**

Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus means to declare the good news that Jesus is ushering in his Kingdom, bringing redemption and reconciliation to broken sinful us and our broken sinful world, so repent and believe. Surrender your whole self – body, mind, and soul – to Him.

David Bosch - "Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ."

Mortimer Arias - "Every generation...has to be evangelized, that is, confronted with the good news of the kingdom in Jesus Christ."

Now, how that works its way out into conversations you have with your friends/coworkers/neighbors/family – is where it takes nuance, skill, wisdom, and practice.

Because what you must learn to do – and again this comes with wisdom and practice... is to – **Meet people where they are, and give them the full gospel.**

We've already addressed that asking good questions helps give you a sense of where someone is at, how they view God, the world, their lives. And now, you want to come alongside them and speak the good news of Jesus – creation, fall, redemption, and restoration – into their lives.

You want to connect their individual story to God's big story.

Helping people see how God's story of creation, fall, redemption, restoration, is the only big story that their story makes sense inside of. When we articulate the gospel to people, that's what we're doing. We're helping them connect the story of their life to God's bigger story. To his commitment to reconcile all things, including them, to himself.

Practice

This is what you're going to be doing in your practice guides this week, but to help us let me just give you a couple of examples of how this might play out.

Coworker

Constantly stressed out. Running ragged. Working 12 hour days. Hustling but feeling depressed, anxious, and beat down.

What might a gospel conversation look like?

"Hey man, it seems like work doesn't stress you out like it does me. Why is that?"

"Thanks for asking Billy. Here's how I think about work as a Christian..."

- **[Creation]** Work is not a bad thing. A desire to work hard and provide is something God wired into all of us.
- **[Fall]** However, in God's story we find that all work is broken. Even our dream jobs, because of what the Bible calls sin, are going to overwhelm us and leave us wanting more. Work can't be everything we want it to be. We can work and work and work and work but we will never find what our hearts truly long for – the validation or comfort or meaning or value or identity we so desperately need.
- **[Redemption]** But here's what is so beautiful about what I believe as a Christian – That in and through Jesus, our desperate desire for identity, meaning, and value are answered. That Christ died, and surrendering to Him as Lord, not to our careers as Lord, is what actually leads to real life, both now and forever.
- **[Restoration]** One day, our souls will find their deepest fulfillment, not in some fictional future moment, or promotion, or title, or income level, but in Christ in eternity.

(Nod awkwardly and go on with your day)

So notice, it's not:

- Oh yeah, work is stressful. Have you thought about becoming a Christian? Jesus gives us peace when work stresses us out!

- That's a cheap gospel. No surrender, no mention of sin, no mention of the cross or the kingdom.
- We take Billy's story and we put it into Christ's story to offer a whole new way of living now and forever.
 - Repenting of our work idolatry – repenting of looking to work to give us our identity and meaning and value.
 - Turning to Christ as Ruler and Lord. Surrendering in faith to Him.

Politics

Election year. Lots of feelings are going to start bubbling. Don't be afraid of these conversations, but be willing to wade into them well.

"They ask you – you're not freaking out right now. Can you give me a reason for the hope that is in you?"

"Thanks for asking Mary Sue..."

- **[Creation]** I believe politics are not a bad thing. They are a neutral thing. Can be a source of good and a source of evil.
- **[Fall]** But I also know that because of sin, the human heart is messed up. That it's bent and crooked – so we're going to keep wanting more power, we're going to keep wanting to advance our own agenda, even at the cost of hurting others. To put it more simply – I know there's more broken about me and the world than simply "the wrong people are in charge of the white house."
- **[Redemption]** But I also know that a bigger redemption needs to happen than just "get the right people elected." While governments can be forces for good, they cannot forgive us of our sins, they cannot reconcile us to God, they cannot usher in God's Kingdom into the world. They are tools, but they are not ultimate – God is King, He's in charge – and His kingdom is the only one that lasts forever. So I care about politics, but I'm more interested in living as a citizen of God's Kingdom, before I'm a citizen of America.
- **[Restoration]** And I know that ultimately – Jesus is going to return, He's going to make all things new. And the ones that get to enjoy that new creation are the ones who have repented and surrendered to God and been brought into His kingdom through Christ Jesus. That's my ultimate hope – not a certain candidate.

All we did was attempt to take their story and connect it somehow to God's bigger story. That is how you articulate the good news of Jesus.

So our **practice** for this week in the practice guide is basically, what I just did. We give you several different Gospel "Simulations." Just stories of imaginary people in your life, and then we give you some space to figure out how you would connect their story to God's story. How you would articulate creation, fall, redemption, restoration to them, based on where they're at and what they currently believe. So we'll work through that together.

Pray.