



In the summer of 1961, the Green Bay Packers were gathered together for the first day of training camp. The previous season ended in heartbreak after being defeated by the Eagles late in the 4th quarter in the NFL Championship. The Green Bay players had been drowning in their sorrows all summer long and finally at training camp they were ready to get back to work. The players assumed they would take it to the next level and start working on the finer details of the game that would help them win the championship. But, their coach Vince Lombardi had a much different idea.

In his best-selling book, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, author David Maraniss explains what happened on the first day of training camp when Lombardi walked onto the field:

*He took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before...He began with the most elemental statement of all. "Gentlemen," he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, "this is a football."*

Lombardi was coaching a group of professional athletes who knew exactly what a football was. Just months before, they had almost won the championship. And yet, Lombardi started at the very beginning with the basics, the fundamentals. *"This is a football, we are on a football field, it's 100 yards long, with an end zone and a side line."* Each player began by reviewing how to block and tackle. Everyone opened up the playbook and started from page one. And six months later, the Green Bay Packers beat the New York Giants 37-0 to win the NFL Championship.<sup>1</sup>

We are continuing a new teaching series for the summer called Basecamp, where we are looking at some of the basic tools for the Christian journey. We are going over the fundamentals of the Christian faith. We've already covered the topics of worship and the Bible. Today, we are going to consider the gospel. If you have been a follower of Jesus for any amount of time, you have heard this word used often. The gospel is the life-changing message about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Unfortunately, here's what happens to many Christians. They think that the gospel is like the "abc" of the Christian life, and after you know it, you then are supposed to move on to deeper

and more important things. And that is the danger. You and I never graduate from the gospel and move on to other things. As Tim Keller said, "The gospel is not the ABC's of Christianity, it's A to Z. It's not just the elementary and introductory truths. The gospel is what drives everything that we do." The gospel is not just what we believe to become a follower of Jesus, it is also the means to grow as a follower of him. This means the gospel is just as important after you come to faith in Jesus as before.

The clearest and most succinct description of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

**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. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.**

### **The Gospel has Real Life Power**

The Apostle Paul wrote several letters to churches in the first century. One of those letters we call 1 Corinthians. It was written to a really messed up church in the ancient city of Corinth. This church was having all kinds of problems. They were suing each other, getting drunk during communion, and some things I'd rather not say with children here! Paul begins by addressing the church as "brothers and sisters." He loves these people and tenderly goes into a lengthy discourse about the resurrection of the body. He knows this topic is controversial in the society of ancient Corinth.

Paul is reminding them of the gospel, something he has proclaimed to them before. Paul says he's already preached this gospel, they've received it and by it, they take their stand. That means they are standing firm in the gospel and allowing it to shape and form their entire lives. But, they needed to be reminded of its centrality because they've strayed from it. So, the gospel isn't merely a message, it is a power, centered on a person, which means it can change you. And that's what he says next in verse two, "by this gospel you are saved..."

<sup>1</sup> <http://jamesclear.com/vince-lombardi-fundamentals>

## The Gospel is GOOD News Announcing That We Have Been Saved

The gospel is first good news. Just this week we were reminded yet again, the world is full of bad news. With the shootings of congressmen in Virginia and at UPS in San Francisco, it seems like every day we are seeing how broken, evil, and messed up the world is. And yet in the gospel we learn that God has not given up on humanity. After God's judgment of sin and evil on the cross, comes the promise of the resurrection. The gospel is good news announcing that we've been saved. The verb "saved" is in the present tense, which means a continuous kind of action. So, the gospel is what saves you and continues to save you. The Corinthians are saved because they have received the gospel **and** continue to live by it.

Christianity teaches we have been saved **from** something and saved **for** something. The gospel is good news that we have been saved **from** God's wrath and **for** a life of love. People back in Corinth and today don't like talking about God's wrath. I hear it all the time from Christians and non-Christians who say things like, "My God is a God of love, not a God of wrath." The Presbyterian Church (USA), a mainline denomination, a few years ago went so far as to remove the great hymn *In Christ Alone* from their hymnal because of the line about God's wrath in it. But, if we strip away the justice of God he is no longer loving. There is no penalty for evil and we are still stuck in our sins with no solution or hope. If we strip away the love of God, then he is no longer just. Because if God is holy, he can't tolerate sin. If he is loving, then he must provide a solution to the problem of sin and evil. In the gospel we see a God who is both loving and just.

The bad news is that we are under God's wrath. But, the good news is we have been saved from it and saved for a life of love. God has given us a way to escape the penalty of our sin and the punishment of hell. He understood our problem, and because he loves us, sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to the earth to bridge the gap between man's sin and a holy God. Jesus who is fully God, became fully human and entered our world to rescue us. Even though he was God, he experienced everything we experienced yet never sinned. The Old Testament sacrificial system was set up to atone for the sins of Israel. The Bible teaches that, "*Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins*" (Heb. 9:22). The sacrificial system was a foreshadow of what Jesus would come to do.

What did Jesus come to do? Paul tells us in verses 3-4, one of the clearest summaries of the gospel, "*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*"

## The Gospel is Good NEWS About Jesus Christ

Paul says the gospel "is of first importance." That means this is not optional and it's not extra credit. This is the core of what the Christian faith is all about—Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. Let's look at each one of those points.

### Jesus Christ died for our sins

The Bible makes it very clear—the problem we all have is sin. Sin is not just something we do that is wrong; it is much deeper than that. We are born with a propensity to do evil. We've inherited this condition a long time ago in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve made a choice to refuse to live God's way and as a result, all humanity would follow. Every day we make choices to honor God that lead to life and choices that dishonor him and lead to spiritual death. When we look at the world and ask, What's wrong, the gospel has an answer for that. The gospel says **you** are the problem. Theologian G.K. Chesterton after seeing a series of articles called, "What's Wrong with the World?" sent a short letter to the editor. He writes, "Dear Sir: Regarding your article 'What's Wrong with the World?' I am. Yours truly, G.K. Chesterton."

It doesn't matter how good you are or how religious you lead your life—God's standard is holiness and perfection. The Ten Commandments were given in part to show us how bad we are and how we all fail to live up to God's standards. We've all sinned and missed the mark. Sin is a deliberate act against God and the penalty for sin is spiritual death. But, Jesus died for our sins. And he was also buried.

### Jesus Christ was buried

Jesus literally died and was buried. That's important because some back in Paul's day and even today believe Jesus didn't actually die. Instead, Jesus passed out and was resuscitated later. Paul says, no, he really died. Years ago, a woman wrote a famous old preacher, J. Vernon McGee, and asked: "Our preacher said that on Easter, Jesus just passed out on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?" McGee replied, "Dear Sister, whip your preacher 39 times with heavy strokes. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then see what happens." Jesus died. Jesus was buried. And finally, Jesus was raised.

### Jesus Christ was raised on the third day

1 Corinthians 15 is an masterful chapter all about the importance of the resurrection. What separates Christianity from all religions is this one single act. That's why the Apostle Paul points to a specific historical event—the resurrection—to argue about

what sets Christianity apart and why it is so important. Easter for example is not a celebration of Christianity. It is not just about the teachings of Jesus. Easter is the celebration of a specific event, without which, there would be no Christianity. Because of the resurrection, Jesus proved he has the power to defeat sin, Satan and death. So the power of sin was broken. Death no longer has the final word. Satan's plans were destroyed. And now, the resurrection gives us, followers of Jesus, the power to live for God and points to our future resurrection when Jesus returns and makes all things new.

Paul says twice, all this happened "according to the Scriptures." The Old Testament, hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, had predicted that the Messiah was going to die. It says that he would be led like a sheep to the slaughter. Jesus' death was the deliberate death of a person who offered his life as a sacrifice. God laid all of our sins upon him and he became our substitute on the cross. Not only did the Scriptures foretell his death but hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Jesus with their very own eyes his crucifixion. Peter, the disciples, James, and 500 others and Paul all saw Jesus in his resurrected body. We also have the testimony of millions of people whose lives have been changed by Christ over the centuries. Jesus died. Jesus was buried. Jesus rose. But what difference does the gospel make in your life and mine?

Last week I made a mistake in my sermon and said I've been married for 14 years. My lovely bride reminded me later that we've been married for 15 years! I'll never forget proposing to Missy on a freezing summer night in San Francisco on Crissy Field overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. It was the best decision I ever made. As I look back on that night, it's funny to think about how much my life and my future hinged on one question, "Will you marry me?" If Missy would have said no, I would have been devastated and who knows where I would be living and what I'd be doing without her. As couples come to me to get married, I tell them whom you marry (if God calls you to marriage), is the second most important decision you will ever make in your life. It affects everything! Everything! But, I can't imagine my life without my wife and our three kids.

But, there is one question that is infinitely more important, a question that affects everything. Jesus asked, "Who do you say I am?" Answering that question is crucial. If Jesus is just a great teacher or rabbi or a prophet or a great man, that means nothing for how you live your life. But, if Jesus is truly the Son of God. If by his life, death and resurrection we are saved. If the gospel really is good news, not just good advice, that means the gospel

changes everything. Tim Keller put it this way, "If we say, 'I believe in Jesus,' but it doesn't affect the way we live, the answer is not that now we need to add hard work to our faith so much as that we haven't truly understood or believed in Jesus at all."

**The gospel changes people.** As we come to faith in Jesus and as we live the Christian life, the gospel shapes our thinking and our behavior. We become people who love God and love our neighbor. We put his kingdom above the building of ours. Humility, boldness, and dependency slowly begin to replace self-sufficiency, pride, and selfishness.

**The gospel impacts culture.** As people are changed, the gospel transforms our beliefs, values and behaviors. The gospel compels us to impact communities and cities with the radical and transforming love and truth of Jesus Christ.

**The gospel brings people together in authentic community.** We no longer need to be fake and pretend we have it all together. Because in Jesus, our identity is not built around our religious performance, but on God's love for us in Christ.

**The gospel affects how we parent.** Fathers, you don't need to have it all together and be super dad. No! The gospel encourages us to point our children to the best father of all—Jesus Christ. In the gospel we have the freedom to blow it with our kids and say I am sorry because we realize how far we fall short.

**The gospel is not just for us.** It reminds us that we don't exist for ourselves any longer. We begin serving others with no strings attached. Because God has been so gracious to us, we show grace by welcoming families, singles, the poor, single parents, people of different races, kids with special needs, the elderly, disillusioned people, people who identify as LGBT, immigrants and strangers. The gospel is meant to be shared to all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. Jesus was clear, "Go and make disciples of all nations." I can go on and on! But this much is clear—**the gospel changes everything.**

What about you? Has the gospel changed you? It's not enough to know what God did in Jesus Christ. You must make a decision and respond to his invitation. How do we respond to God's offer? We first must turn from our sin and turn to God. This is called repentance. It's an act of the will that rejects sin and embraces God. Only God can remove our sin and give us eternal life. But, only you can turn from your sins and receive Jesus. I am going to give you a chance to do that when we pray. Becoming a Christian literally means you have been "born again." This is a spiritual rebirth that happens the moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ. Being a Christian means having a life-giving relationship with him. It's getting to know him for the rest of your life.

For those of us who have already responded to the gospel, as you evaluate your life this morning, are you truly living the gospel? Is it still changing you today? Or have you strayed from it? Is it impacting everything you do? And how are you doing with sharing the gospel with those you are in relationship with in your family, work, neighborhood and school? The gospel is the life-changing

message about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. If this is true, then it means that the gospel changes everything.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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