

Introducing the Gospel

The Gospel Truth – Part III

Romans 1:2-3

Introduction

Imagine camping by a beautiful stream that runs through a wooded valley. In the morning, you wash your face in that clear sparkling water and drink some of it too, only to become violently ill a few hours later. Why? Because upstream, at the head of that stream, a man has poured toxic waste into the water. Now, all the water that flows down the mountain and through the valley is polluted. Even though it looks good and clean, there are invisible toxins.

Adam stands at the fountainhead of humanity – and he has polluted the stream of mankind. You might say, “Hey, that’s not fair, I didn’t eat that fruit.”

Well, you did not eat forbidden fruit, but you have experienced forbidden sin. You may not have eaten that apple, but you might have stolen one. In other words, you have committed your own sin, which proves that you have indeed been infected with the polluted water of Adam’s nature. All of us are born into the family of Adam, and our case is terminal.

The Need for the Gospel – Why did it come?

The reason the gospel was first promised in Genesis, chapter 3, verse 15, was because humanity was cursed and sin would bring its penalty, called death. The reason you have to be born again, ladies and gentlemen, is because you were born, the first time, into a diseased family that is polluted with sin and condemned to death.

John, chapter 8, verse 44, records the Lord saying that the father of humanity is the devil, and that humanity lacks because it is just like its father, who is nothing more than a liar. You happen to have bigger family problems than you ever imagined. You have a problem with some of your relatives that you never thought possible.

We have, as a human race, been infected; we have drunk from polluted water; we are terminally infected with sin. We need to be adopted out of this dying family into the living family of God.

The religions of the world do nothing more than try to build filters for that polluted water. Religions have become masters at masking the effects of disease. They have attempted to produce spiritual medicines to keep the pain of guilt and shame at a minimum. They have produced cosmetics that make the soul look less diseased and more spiritual. They have even invented ways to deny our condition and have provided self-improvement plans to make us feel better about our sinful selves.

The religions of this culture do not offer everlasting forgiveness, but a system of ritual and works that, if you do them well, maybe you might get into heaven. “Maybe” is not good news.

Several years ago, in India, I was in a Hindu temple waiting area. I noticed a plaque on the wall that had a message that declared how to find eternal life. It read,

He who desires to cross the painful ocean of worldly life, which is full of the crocodiles of anger, greed and infatuation should catch hold of the Bhagavad Gita which has the

disciplines of action, devotion and wisdom as its oars. It will easily take him to the land of liberation.

That was their way to heaven, or Nirvana. This was their gospel – if you hang on to the oars of disciplined action and devotion, then maybe you will make it through the crocodile infested waters of life to a better life.

Upon further study, you learn that every person must spend time in one of twenty-one hells that burn away bad karma. Once purged, the soul is recycled to a higher state in the next life and the cycle begins again. If they have been particularly bad in the previous life, they might be condemned to one of the lowest hells where they are cooked in jars or eaten by ravens.

Buddhism has its seven hot hells, complete with torture chambers and quagmire, but there are also eight cold hells for those guilty of lesser sins.

Frankly, all the man-made religions of the world are basically the same in this – they are not good news.

The western world has concocted its own religious systems. They may not threaten you with being cooked in a jar or being frozen in a cold hell, but they are equally hopeless and empty in their system of self-improvement and self-salvation.

They are like the emperor who paraded around town absolutely naked, having been duped into believing, in his pride, that he was wearing such fine and expensive clothing that only the sophisticated could see the exquisite fabric. And, as the emperor went outside to show off his clothing, which was, in effect, his “birthday suit,” his kingdom watched in silence, not wanting to say anything, lest they betray their lack of intelligence. But, finally, a little boy said out loud, “Mommy, the emperor has no clothes.”

The children of God have a message for all the religions throughout the entire world. Man-made religion has no hope; no answer to offer! Even with all its pomp and circumstance, its ritual and ceremony, it leaves a person exposed and naked before one true God, before whom they stand condemned in their sin.

A few years ago, in India, I shot a video clip of a priest washing in the polluted waters of the Ganges River. He believed this ritual would wash his sin away.

The reason there are so many religions throughout the world, is because there is something inside the human heart that knows it needs something

outside of itself for cleansing. We will discuss that later in Romans, chapter 1.

There is something about us that condemns us with a sense of emptiness and guilt. There must be some ritual, some cleansing, or some way to silence the guilt. There must be something or someone who can help!

Socrates once lamented, “O that someone would arise to show us God.”

Mankind knows there must be a way to find forgiveness; there must be a way to eternity; there must be a source of hope; there must be someone who can diagnose our terminal condition and provide a cure.

Paul will be the one to arise and show God to us – and he will show the way to God, which is the sum and substance of the gospel truth. Is it any wonder then, that the word “gospel,” in the Greek Bible, is a word that literally means, “good news”?

Yes, there is sin; yes, there is shame; yes, there is evil; yes, there is death – but there is good news also. Paul summarizes the good news in Romans, chapter 5, verses 17 and 18.

For if by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.

Skip to verse 21.

so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

That is good news! Indeed, we have all drunk from the polluted stream of Adam’s race, but there is another One who has begun a new race of justified men and women, boys and girls. There is a way to have, and know you have, eternal life. It is through this One – Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, in chapter 1, verse 13a, paraphrased, “[You have heard] the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation . . .”

There is such a thing today, as the gospel truth. In an age of deception, lying, distrust, religious confusion, and pious manipulation, here, at last, is the gospel truth. Paul outlines for us, a description of the good news.

The Source of the Gospel – Where did it come from?

A second important question is, “Where did the gospel come from?”

In the last part of Romans, chapter 1, verse 1, Paul declares that this is,

. . . the gospel of God

You could render that genitive construction so that it would read, “This is the gospel whose source is God.”

Paul had to establish that the gospel has a divine source or it would have no credibility to a world that was already filled with novel religions. In fact, during the days of Paul, there were also other forms of the gospel.

In II Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 4, Paul warns of men who will preach a different Jesus; a different spirit; a different gospel. In other words, they will talk about the gospel, they will talk about the spirit, they will even talk about Jesus, but it is a different Jesus.

In Galatians, chapter 1, verse 7b, Paul warned the believers along that same line, when he wrote,

. . . there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

He goes on, in verses 8 through 9, to say words that everyone needs to hear today more than ever.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

This is one of the few times Paul ever repeated himself in the same paragraph.

The word “contrary,” used in the phrase, “. . . if . . . an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you . . .”, is a word that can be translated, “more than or in addition to”. Paul was probably referring to Judaism in its quest not to necessarily deny Christ, but to add to Christ the works of the Law. They were adding to the gospel. It was Jesus plus something else for salvation.

When I see a copy of Mary Baker Eddy’s book on the key to understanding the scripture, or the *Book of Mormon*, which claims to be another testament to add to the New Testament, I think of this verse. The

irony is that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed it was an angel who led him to the plates which, translated, provided new revelation regarding the gospel.

What does Paul say? Look at verse 8 again.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

In other words, “Even if . . . an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel in addition to the gospel I have already, in the past, preached to you, let him be accursed.”

That is why Paul’s introduction of the gospel truth is so critical. This is not Paul’s gospel; this is not new revelation from an angel, this gospel has, as its source, God.

This is the gospel of God. It is not called “good advice,” it is called “good news”.

The Messengers of the Gospel – Who told us about it?

Now, if it is truly from God, then it is not something new, or novel, or inconsistent with what God has already revealed, right? So, Paul makes that logical point next, as he introduces the messengers of the gospel.

Who told us about the gospel? Paul’s answer is, “The prophets.”

Notice Romans, chapter 1, verse 1b again, and verse 2.

. . . the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures

In other words, this is the old gospel. This gospel is not something new. It is not something God threw together rather hastily after Adam and Eve sinned. He was not in heaven watching and saying, “I can’t believe they ate that fruit. Now what are we going to do?”

There has never been an emergency meeting of the Trinity. I Peter, chapter 1, verses 19 through 20, tells us that the plan of redemption preceded the formation of the world.

The prophets, since the time of Moses, have been prophesying of His coming. In fact, the first coming of Christ was prophesied in, at least, three hundred thirty Old Testament passages.

As Paul dictates the book of Romans, he will quote from:

- Genesis five times,
- Exodus four times,
- Leviticus two times,
- Deuteronomy five times,
- I Kings two times,
- Psalms fifteen times,
- Proverbs two times,
- Isaiah nineteen times,
- Ezekiel one time,
- Hosea two times,
- Joel one time,
- Nahum one time,
- Habakkuk one time, and
- Malachi one time.

In Luke, chapter 24, verses 27, we read,

Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He [Jesus] explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

In John, chapter 5, verse 18, the religious leaders were arguing with Jesus because He performed a miracle on the Sabbath day. When Jesus compared Himself to God the Father, they then wanted to kill Him. He said to them in verse 39,

You search the Scriptures . . .

(in other words, as Barnhouse paraphrased it, “You’ve always got your nose stuck in the Bible.”),

. . . because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify of Me

Jesus is saying that the Old Testament was showing the way to eternal life and that it was pointing through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He goes on to say, in verses 45 and 46, of John, chapter 5,

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.

Can the Lord make it any clearer than that? He continues further to say, in verse 47,

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?

What were the writings of Moses? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In other words, “If you can’t hear the truth of the gospel in Genesis, you won’t hear the gospel truth in Matthew.”

You cannot pick and choose which books of the Bible you think are right and which ones you think are fables. If you can believe the very first verse of the Bible, which says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” then you can believe every other verse in the Bible.

Is it any wonder then, that so much of the attack by Satan, through the centuries, has been leveled against the first book of Moses, the book of Genesis? Why? Because, according to Jesus, if you do not believe Genesis, you will not believe Revelation.

From the first verse to the last verse, the gospel of God has been revealed. The Bible is all you need to discover the gospel truth.

John Wesley, wrote, around 1870, these profound words,

I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. A few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity. I want to know one thing – the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end he came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book – for this end, to find the way to heaven.ⁱ

Paul declares in his opening sentence, “This is the gospel truth and it is good news; you heard about it through the prophets.”

Having established the need for the gospel, the source of the gospel, and the first messengers of the gospel, Paul now moves to the content of the gospel truth.

The Content of the Gospel – What is it about?

Now Paul moves forward to reveal the answer to the next question, “What is the gospel all about?”

Paul tells us, in verse 1b through 3.

. . . [this is] the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, . . .

(note this),

. . . concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh

Jesus' humanity

Now, why mention that Jesus, God's Son who was born, is related to David? Is it not impressive enough to say that He is the eternal Son of God? Not unless, as Paul fully understands, you know the importance of his royal connection as the qualification to sitting on David's throne as Messiah.

The prophecies had declared that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, from the tribe of Judah. The true Messiah must be a descendant from the royal line of David, and thus, legally a rightful heir to the throne. This is why the gospel of Matthew begins with the genealogy of Christ, which traces Jesus' earthly family line back to King David.

However, there is something even more fascinating about Christ's human lineage than that. The diagram below, of the two genealogies found in the gospels, will make this easier to understand. One genealogy is from Matthew, chapter 1, and the other is from Luke, chapter 3. Note the prominence of Jesus' royal connection.

Matthew 1	Luke 3
Abraham	Abraham
David	David
Solomon	Nathan
Joseph (royal right)	Mary (legal right)
Jesus	Jesus
Joseph's step son, by adoption, has the historical right to be the King of Israel!	Mary's son, by birth, has the legal right to be the King of Israel!

In Matthew, chapter 1, the genealogy is actually that of Joseph. It traces his line from Abraham through David and then, through Solomon. God had promised David, in I Chronicles, chapter 22, verses 9 and 10, that Solomon's throne would be established in Israel. Thus, the future kings would come from the descendants of David through Solomon.

This was promised, even though Solomon was not the first born son of David. In fact, Solomon's

older brother was Nathan, who, according to II Samuel, chapter 5, verse 14, was born in Jerusalem. It is the line of David through Nathan that ultimately, produces a girl named Mary.

This is an example of the beauty of God's sovereignty!

Nathan, the son of David, had a lineage that ran until it culminated in the birth of a girl, named Mary. Mary was then, a woman who could pass on to her son the legal right to sit on the throne.

Solomon, another son of David, had a lineage that ran until it produced a boy, named Joseph. Joseph was then, a man who had the royal and historical right to sit on the throne as king.

Then, guess what happened! These two distant cousins, named Mary and Joseph, got engaged. Their engagement meant that, had there been a throne in Jerusalem, their first born child had both legal and royal rights to sit on the throne of David.

In fact, remember the Christmas story, which told of Joseph and Mary having to travel back to the home of their forefather, as all the Jews were to be part of a census and then taxed. They went to Bethlehem because Joseph, the head of this household, was a direct descendant of King David. Therefore, that baby boy, who was born that night and wrapped in strips of cloth and placed in a straw filled manger, was none other than the rightful King of Israel.

There is more, so take a deep breath and hang on. There is a slight problem. Centuries before the birth of Joseph, a curse from God had been placed on his particular line. So, let us note the problem of a royal curse in Jesus' genealogy.

In Matthew's genealogy, in chapter 1, verses 11 and 12, you discover an ancestor named Jeconiah. Jeconiah had been cursed by God with a curse that took the throne away from any of his descendants. In Jeremiah, chapter 22, verse 30, we read,

Thus says the Lord, . . . [Jecooniah] will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.

And indeed, none of Jeconiah's seven sons, nor their descendants, were given the throne of David. But, Joseph is a descendant of Jeconiah. Therefore, any biological son of Joseph cannot sit on David's throne because of this judgement.

How do you solve the problem?

Jesus' deity

God's sovereign design was so masterful – Mary and Joseph were married, but Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit's overshadowing of her womb. Thus, Joseph would become, not the biological father, but the adoptive father of Jesus. This allowed Jesus to circumvent the curse, and yet, the royal, historical, and legal rights to sit on the throne were still passed on to Him.

The virgin birth of Christ is of paramount importance. Centuries earlier, Isaiah, the prophet, declared, in chapter 7, verse 14,

. . . Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel [or God with us].

Matthew and Luke both plainly reveal Mary as that virgin. In fact, Joseph was going to put her away privately, when he discovered that she was pregnant. He knew the father had to have been someone else; she had obviously been unfaithful to her betrothal vows. It would take a vision in the night to show to

Joseph what God had in mind for that baby. That baby was nothing less than the miraculously conceived Messiah.

Barnhouse clarified it well, when he said,

So Jesus was the uncursed Messiah, the legal Messiah, the true Messiah – in fact, Jesus was the only possible Messiah. The lineage of David ended with Him.

So, the apostle Paul, in introducing the gospel to his audience, knew full well that the Messiah had to be none other than a descendant of David. Thus, you read in Romans, chapter 1, verse 3, that the gospel is,

concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh

This son of David was the promised Messiah, the rightful heir to the throne of David. The Messiah had come. This was indeed, good news!

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ⁱ John Wesley, quoted by James Boice in Romans Vol. 1 (Baker Books), p. 34.