

It's a Beautiful Life: Living In, Living Out

"Gospelled"

10-2-16

Text: Mark 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

Reflection Questions...

"Is a gospel that offers a secure passage into the afterlife, but fails to address my present dysfunctionality robust enough? Can it really be considered good news?"

"How might you function knowing that you are already 'in Christ': that you're not simply the same old person with a few more religious experiences or God-hobbies, but you are actually a new creation; someone that better reflects who you were always meant to be?"

"What claims is the gospel making on your life, currently? How does it seem to be interrupting the status-quo [challenging your version of reality and calling into question who or what you are trusting for life? What response is the gospel presently evoking in you?"

"In your own formation, what was your understanding of the gospel? Was it primarily about personal salvation or was it more collective in its scope?"

"How do you think the way we hear the word 'gospel' differs from that of Jesus' first listeners? Is it important to understand the backstory? How do you see the gospel differently now that you have more of an understanding of its original context?"

"Why is an approach to the gospel which addresses our own personal sins, but fails to encourage or empower us to experience real-life-transformation simply not a robust gospel?"

"What are the limits to a gospel that only addresses life after death? What are the limits of a gospel which only speaks to our present reality without hope for something new... something better?"

"Now that the Kingdom has arrived—now that God's lovingly-restorative rule is available to all-- how should that impact the quality of my marriage? How should it effect the ways that I am with my children? How will it affect the values which impact the ways that I conduct myself on the job?"

Teaching Notes...

"What is the gospel?"

Poll a dozen people with the question and you will likely get a variety of responses, each with some similarities and some glaring differences.

Some will emphasize personal salvation and the other the transformation of society through people committed to doing good and establishing a better world. Each is, in a sense, telling the same story and each is somehow incomplete in its expression.

The gospel was presented to me in a way that seemed rather condensed and concise: accept Jesus and secure your place in some disembodied future bliss or reject him and rot in hell forever. *“What was that first one again?”*

Perhaps, of first importance, is understanding what Jesus’ original listeners would have understood the gospel to mean.

When Jesus spoke, he would have used concepts and figures of speech which would have been relevant to his listeners. Our issue is that we are a few thousand years removed from that context so there are some gaps in communication.

The gospel is both an announcement and an invitation.

The gospel is the announcement that God has acted in Jesus to restore humans back to their humanness: to lovingly reconnect them with God and each other and to empower them to resume their positions as stewards of all that he calls good.

The word “gospel” itself simply means, “good news.”

In ancient Roman literature, the equivalent was the Greek term *euangelion*, which meant “a good announcement,”; “good news.” In our vernacular, it would be best translated, “Breaking News”.

When a new King was positioned in authority, the announcement went out that people should “repent” and trust the good news. He was not calling for people to feel sorry for their sins, but to now re-think their life and loyalties in light of this new declaration. They were being asked to change allegiances; live into another story. They would need not only a re-orientation of their thinking, but a renewal of their hearts.

Most NT scholars would agree that the backstory for the use of the word *“gospel”* is rooted in Isaiah, particularly chapters 40 and 52.

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who say to Zion (Jerusalem), ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah is writing to a group of people who are anticipating the end of “exile”. The end of exile is linked to the appearance of one who would be a “way-preparer”. This “way-preparer” will come bearing ‘good news’. The reason that such a declaration from John the Baptist resonated with people is because it was framed within a story in which they had been thoroughly informed and formed. You can imagine the reaction that it evoked.

Whatever we want to say about the “gospel”, it has to be tethered to the Story and Paul sees the Story as fundamentally God’s passionate response to the devastation of all that he loves.

“Salvation”: the most comprehensive word that brings together all of the aspects of God’s loving intentions and movements. It is not only a way of describing the self-initiated movement of God to rescue us, but a way of describing the consequence of right beliefs and then cultivating a lifestyle which allowed you to experience its benefits--- its blessing... tangible goodness.

The Story never offers us any remedy to the human dilemma which does not include (2) fundamental responses: 1) repentance, 2) faith. It involves re-thinking and re-orienting around another way.

Acts 20:21 *“I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike- the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God [one motion; one posture], and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.”*

If we really believe that God is offering us a ‘better’ way to live (which is real life), then we can only realize a ‘rescue’ (exodus), of sorts, from our own self-destructive choices and the self-determined life by not only re-thinking all of life, but by actually trusting another way to be human: a re-ordering which makes such repentance valid/identifiable.

The gospel is God’s way of explaining the story.

The gospel tells us why we are dissatisfied, why we struggle with relationships, why we have war and racism and sex-trafficking. The gospel shows the rugged determination of God to recover and restore all that was lost due to deception and defiance.

The gospel meant that because of Jesus, life could be different. That’s what we all really needed to know.

Romans 5:12-21 [read]

▶ Adam is offered as the ‘icon’ (image) of God and lives disobediently; Jesus’ comes as the ‘icon’ of God (Hebrews 1) and demonstrates what it’s like to be fully human.

▶ Adam’s single act brought death to all of creation; Jesus’ single act reversed the devastating effects and made new creation possible.

▶ Adam’s single act disconnected him from God and everyone else; Jesus’ single act made possible right relationship with God, each other and creation.

The point that all of the metaphors and images is that if we are identified with Adam, we are still disconnected, still committed to life independent of God--- still experiencing the relational ruin brought on by sin. If we are identified with Christ (‘in Christ’), then everything that’s true of him is true of us.

The gospel is not simply a well-formed presentation, but a 3-D representation of the presence and power of God with us.

The gospel is the *“power of God for salvation...”* Romans 1:16. It is the limitless capacity of God to radically alter the human person by freeing them to live in another story: where light overwhelms darkness, where forgiveness trumps our defiance, where reconciliation interrupts fractured relationships, where mercy wins over judgment, where grace overcomes condemnation.

Even when the word is not used specifically, *“the gospel”* shows up on every page of the Story. It’s the sound of Adam and Eve crouching in the bushes, scrambling for something without (3) leaves, and the love-sick voice of God calling, *“Where are you?”*

The gospel is the young son who demands his inheritance, gives his dad the finger and makes his way out into “freedom” where he blows it all on liquor and porn and his leeching posse. With no place left to turn but back to the father he had treated with contempt, he returns, reeking of pig manure and failure and gets the surprise of his life: the “welcome home, son” banner his dad had made the day he left.

The gospel is, first of all, about God's faithfulness; about his triumph, not only over death, but over everything that was killing us... robbing us of life.

It's the revelation of who God is and what he is doing in the world. It demands a change from viewing salvation as something we receive, to viewing salvation as something in which we are called to participate [1 Peter 2:9].

To receive salvation is to be swept up into something larger and greater than ourselves. It is to be called into something larger and greater than us, to be invited to participate in God's saving purpose and plan for the world. **This is about God attempting to win back our trust!**