

Really Good News

Sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Thesis: We are here today to talk about really good news. Something happened; it makes sense in a larger context and backstory; there is a new future; and everything has changed in between what happened and what will happen.

Text: Matthew 6:10; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 15:1-6; 15:20-28; 50-58; Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 96:11-13; Isaiah 40 and 52; Revelation 21 and 22

Points:

1. What is the good news? See *Simply Good News* by NT Wright.
2. Remind people that we have really good news to share in Jesus and because of Jesus.
3. The good news is not just words and information, but demonstrations of power, goodness, love, joy, etc. (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

This morning I want to share really good news. The word for good news in the New Testament is the word gospel.

Christianity is good news first. Something has happened and, as a result of that event, everything has changed.

In many churches, the good news has subtly changed into good advice. Here's how to live, they say. Here's how to pray. Here are techniques for helping you become a better Christian, a better person, a better wife or husband. And in particular, here's how to make sure you're on the right track for what happens after death. Take this advice: say this prayer and you'll be saved. You won't go to hell; you'll go to heaven. Here's how to do it. This is advice, not news (*Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good*, NT Wright, Kindle Edition).

Jesus came with a different message than simply giving people a new religious system, a new morality, or new advice on how to escape the earth and get to heaven. He came talking about the gospel of the kingdom of God. He taught us to pray, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10). The story Jesus told was not how to get to heaven, but how God came into the world to put heaven and earth back together. The story of the Bible is how God was going to make all things right, as the Creator had designed the world and life. That is why Jesus came, lived, died on a cross, and was resurrected.

Starting with Octavian [Emperor Augustus, after a 13-year civil war], the Roman emperors regularly used the words good news to describe both what they had already achieved and what life would now be like as a consequence. When the early Christians used this language, they used it in a similar way. Something had happened and because of which everything was now different. Something would happen that would complete this initial victory (like Octavian returning to Rome and setting up his court). As a result, the present moment was new and different. This good news transformed people's lives. It was bound to (*Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good*, NT Wright, Kindle Edition).

Paul quotes (in his letter to the Corinthians) what seems to be the standard early Christian summary of the good news. This is worth looking at carefully. Remember...: for something to qualify as news, there has to be (1) an announcement of an event that has happened; (2) a larger context, a backstory, within which this makes sense; (3) a sudden unveiling of the new future that lies ahead; and (4) a transformation of the present moment, sitting between the event that has happened and the further event that therefore will happen. That is how news works. It is certainly how the early Christian good news worked...

Everything pivots around the complex event that had happened: the Messiah died, was buried, was raised, was seen. Take that away and Christianity collapses. Put it in its proper place and the whole world is different. That is the news (*Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good*, NT Wright, Kindle Edition).

The Good News: Something happened; it makes sense in a larger context and backstory; there is a new future; and everything has changed in between what happened and what will happen.

Now, brothers, **I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep** (1 Corinthians 15:1-6).

Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One who fulfills the word of God and comes to make all things right and new. He changes the whole world.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [this was King David's father; Jesus is the fulfillment of the lineage of David]; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- 3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious (Isaiah 11:1-10).

Jesus is coming back again and will put things right.

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; **then, when he comes**, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 **For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.** 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).*

Because of Jesus, everything has changed for us between his first and second coming: we live with expectation and we partner with the Lord now in his renewing work.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be

to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

How do people respond to this news?

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good, NT Wright, Kindle Edition.

But Paul knew perfectly well that getting the gospel right wasn't easy. As we have already hinted, there were huge pressures from two directions. Some thought it was all absolutely crazy. And some found it positively offensive (1 Corinthians 1:21-25).

But this is the heart of Paul's good news. The Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Bible... and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Bible. Understand the Bible and it all makes sense. But of course, being non-Jews, they don't know the Bible, still less understand it. And meanwhile the Jews who heard Paul in the synagogue are still alarmed. Is this going to mean a complete overhaul of their wonderful traditions, their whole way of life?

That's another question. But let's stick with what happens when Paul makes this announcement. He knows it makes no sense to his hearers. He knows that any Jews listening may well find it scandalous or even blasphemous. But he persists. There is after all one true God, the God of Israel. He made the whole world, and he planned an amazing rescue operation for that world. That's the backstory, and the news is that this rescue operation has now happened! Jesus, who died and was raised, is Israel's Messiah —and in Israel's Bible, the Messiah, when he comes, will be Lord of the whole world. That's why this is a message for everybody, not just Jews.

So what happens when Paul announces this message? This is where the truly strange bit happens. As we saw a moment ago, Paul says that the gospel is a scandal to Jews and folly to Gentiles (non-Jews), but "to those who are called" it will be "God's power and God's wisdom." What does he mean by "called"? And in what sense is this message "power and wisdom"?

Paul says similar things elsewhere, too. He declares in one passage that the good news is "God's power, bringing salvation" (Rom. 1:16). He speaks elsewhere about the gospel coming not "in word only, but in power, and in the holy spirit, and in great assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). So what does all this mean?

What Paul refers to is something that happens when this good news is announced. He had seen this happen again and again. Although this good news is a scandal to Jews; although this good news is crazy, stupid nonsense to non-Jews; although nobody in his or her right mind would believe it . . . yet, nevertheless, something happens to some of the people listening. The message, the royal announcement, seems to go into them like a hot drink on a cold day (perhaps, since we're talking about Greece, we might say a cold drink on a hot day). It refreshes them. It energizes them. Sometimes it even heals them of bodily ailments. They find, welling up inside, a sense of astonishment, of being loved.

With this comes a realization that, after all, this good news actually does make sense. Paul has seen this happen, too—seen what it's like when the light goes on in someone's face, when puzzlement or shock is suddenly replaced with a dawning recognition. He hasn't asked people to fit two or three awkward and incredible things into their existing view of the world; he has told them the most awkward and incredible thing you can imagine, in the sure knowledge that this news creates its own new world. But it isn't, as you might imagine, a world apart, a kind of zany private fantasyland. It's a world that then makes sense—challenging, life-altering sense, but sense nonetheless—of every other aspect of the world, from farming and fishing to politics and philosophy, from love and laughter to history and hope.

They found out that's not the way to be human. They want to turn away entirely from that way of life. They want to find a new way to live.

When people find this happening to them, they are welcomed into a new family. (That's just as well, because in Paul's world, as in some parts of the world today, their own families may then reject them.) Within that family, they quickly learn how the gospel works out in practice. The announcement of what has

happened—Jesus's death and resurrection as the fulfillment of the ancient biblical promises and divine purposes—is matched by the assurance of what will happen in the future, when God is "all in all," transforming the whole of creation and raising his people into new, transformed, bodily life. And held within those two poles, they learn that the life they now live in the present is to be transformed by its relation to the past and the future. Because Jesus died and was raised, those who belong to him have died and been raised, and they must live accordingly. Because God is going to remake the whole world and raise his people from the dead, they must live in the present in accordance with that ultimate promised destiny. Everything will be different.

Isaiah's good news went like this (Isaiah 40 and 52): The one true God is on the move again! He has overcome all the powers of the world—the dark powers that enslave and corrupt and destroy genuine human life. He has overcome every obstacle that stands in the way of his people being restored to their land and their status as his people. And that means nothing can now stand in the way of his long-planned new creation. Finally all the ancient promises are going to come true. And in the middle of it all, at the heart of the good news, stands this promise: this God is coming, back in person, and all nations will see his glory. This good news isn't about a mere human emperor. It is about the return of the true king, the God of all creation.

Let's take it step by step. Paul believed that the return of YHWH had happened in Jesus. He believed that this continued to happen when he made the announcement about Jesus. God had come back in the person of Jesus; God was coming, to the whole world, in the presence and power of his Spirit whenever the good news was announced. And one day, God—the God now made known in Jesus—would come back to finish the task, to be all in all, to fill the world with his glory and love, to transform everything, to rectify everything, to heal everything with his powerful love.

That was the good news, according to the Bible and according to Paul. Something had happened. Something would happen. And in between, something powerful and mysterious was happening in the lives of all those who found themselves caught up in it. If we want to recapture the dynamic of the original early Christian gospel, we need to recapture this triple vision, and to see in particular what this tells us about the meaning of the word God. That is what this book is about. And it is also about the ways in which, in our day just as in Paul's, some find this good news a scandal and others find it boring nonsense, while still others discover that it unleashes God's power and unveils his wisdom.

This is central to the good news Jesus announced. It isn't just that God is becoming king, through Jesus and what he is doing, but that God's kingship is a different sort of kingship altogether. There is a different kind of power, and it is the power of the gospel—the power announced by the gospel, the power wielded by the gospel. It is the power neither of brute force nor of superior argument but of something that goes much deeper, into every area of human life. The early Christians called it the power of agape'. Our modern word love doesn't begin to get near what they meant by that, but it will have to do for the moment as a signpost to a great, multidimensional, all-embracing energy, which swept people off their feet in the first century and continues to do so today (*Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good*, NT Wright, Kindle Edition).

Ministry Time

1. Today, you have heard the good news. I believe that by that revelation we see all things more differently.
2. Some of us need to be reminded about what we are sharing and why.
 - a. Today, we have been recalibrated in the way we think about the good news and what it means to share good news.
 - b. That is called repentance.
3. Some of us have been impacted by this message today.
 - a. We can feel the power of God touching us and presence of God speaking to us.
 - b. It doesn't all make sense, but, we want to receive this Jesus and become a part of what God is doing.
 - c. I want to lead you in a prayer to receive Jesus as Lord of your life and to express your desire to follow him.
4. Some of us are on a spiritual journey.
 - a. We are processing what we have heard.
 - b. Thank you for listening today.
 - c. Thank you for being here with us.
 - d. As you wrestle with what you have heard, I pray that you will have humility and grace to explore who and what Jesus is all about.