

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JUNE 2024 | GALATIANS 1:6-9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-9, ESV

JESUS' VERSION OF THE GOSPEL

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said there were many versions of the gospel being proclaimed, but that there is only one true gospel, and it carries with it the blessing of God while all others are cursed (see Galatians 1:6-9). Still today there are various versions of the gospel being promoted, and it is still imperative that we know what is the true gospel.

In my early days of ministry, we often talked of the styles of popular preachers. It was not uncommon to hear it said of a particular speaker: *"He is a gospel preacher."* What we usually meant is that he would always close his message, regardless of the subject or theme, with a brief summary of John 3:16 and an

invitation to come forward to profess faith in Jesus as personal Savior and Lord. No matter what, you gotta get the gospel in there! There were also those who were hard on sin and sinners and demanded quick and decisive repentance from sinful behavior. Then there were those who focused totally on the positive and assured everyone that God loves everyone with no mention of sin, the cross, the resurrection, or judgment.

Of all the styles of preaching I've come across, however, the most dangerous versions are those that somehow present the message of the gospel as a transaction between us and God. It is the "if you will....., then God will..."

proposition. They promise great benefits if we will meet the requirements. The implication is that humans can deal directly with God about getting blessings and avoiding curses. The assumption is that we have something with which to trade. As if there is something God wants or needs and is willing to give something to get it. Taken to its logical conclusion, this version assumes we can repent thoroughly enough to get God's blessings, that we can be sorry enough to gain His sympathy, or that we can will ourselves into morality and push the right buttons of heaven's vending machine to entice God to act on our behalf. It is an insidious version of the gospel. It appeals to human autonomy. We would like to think that we control the levers and can determine what level of blessings we want.

Of course the gospel as described in the Bible is a God-initiated salvation. We have nothing to offer but our sin. We had to have a mediator between us and God. Our faith and resulting obedience is the fruit of God's grace first being shed abroad in Jesus Christ. We can only love as we are first loved. We can only believe because He is faithful. We can only change when His Spirit changes us from the inside. The gospel is always good news, and it is always better than having a new principle to enact, proposition to believe, or precept to obey.

The gospel is a declaration that God has done everything we are required to do and has credited it to our account. The gospel is that we have been placed in Christ so that everything true about Him is true about us. We are in Him - in His righteousness, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His rule. We are with Him in life and in death, and when He returns we shall come with Him.

The evangelist Mark gives the most complete and succinct description of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed, and he even called it the gospel of God. That must be the right one!

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1:14-15, ESV

The God-sanctioned version of the gospel has three dynamics to it:

First, there is the announcement of the fulfillment of previous hope. The gospel is a narrative with a plot and a climax. God's action in Jesus is the fulfillment of all previous promises, types, shadows, prophecies, and projections. The gospel that Jesus preached was not an

existential, theological dogma that one can believe regardless of any relationship to history. Without the story of the creation, fall, flood, Abraham, Moses, David, and exile, there is no gospel. Eden pointed to a future garden where all wrongs are made right. Noah pointed to the beginning of a new race on earth. Abraham looked forward to the ultimate Son who was Jesus. Joseph was a shadow of Jesus who, though mistreated, became leader of the government. Moses was a type of a future leader who would lead all God's people into the land of fulfilled promise. David was a king depicting the One who would rule over God's creation forever. The prophets all told of a time when God would restore His people under a new covenant and complete through human instrumentality His original purpose on earth. That is fulfilled in Jesus. John the baptizer was the last of the Old Testament prophets, and He pointed out the final Lamb of God who finalized all temple sacrifice.

All four of the evangelists who wrote accounts of the good news did so to show how Jesus fulfilled aspects of Old Testament hope. Matthew featured Jesus as the Son of David and fulfillment of all things Jewish. Mark featured the promised kingdom of God. Luke revealed how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's hope of a suffering servant. John shows how Jesus' appearance was as monumental as

creation. In Luke's account of the early church (The Book of Acts), he connects the purpose of creation with the role of Israel, and the ministry of Jesus with the continued mission of the church as the body of Christ on earth. It is abundantly clear that Jesus is the climax of the story, the star of the narrative, and the center of God's purpose. The gospel is not proclaimed fully unless there is the "time is fulfilled" dynamic.

The second dynamic of the proclaimed gospel is the announcement of a new arrival. Not just any arrival, but one that is so monumental that, if true, everything is reinterpreted. Since the days of Daniel in the 6th century BC, the Israelites had anticipated the coming of the kingdom of God. During the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments, a genre of literature arose that captured and stoked the hope of a golden age when God would invade the world with His kingdom and vindicate His people. The salvation presented in the gospel of God included the restoration of creation. God still loves the world and made provision for its redemption. He brought the rule of heaven to earth in Jesus who introduced a kind of love that cannot be defeated by the swords of men. Evangelist John writes to describe the arrival of the kingdom as a new creation. If we can think of the radical transformation in original creation

from nothing to something, we can see that the coming of the kingdom of God to earth in Jesus is just as astounding. John lists a series of signs that Jesus did that show that the new age has arrived. He turns water into wine at a wedding, pointing to the new covenant and the completion of the old age. He cleanses the temple in Jerusalem, pointing to a new temple in His body that makes the previous temple obsolete.

The third dynamic of Jesus' version of the gospel is the inevitable response to the announcement. Repent and believe the gospel! If the announcement is true, it cannot be ignored. It is a matter of life and death. If a new creation is here, we must embrace it. Jesus tells Nicodemus that a new birth is necessary to see it and to enter it. It is not a new doctrine that we must adjust to. It is not another theory to consider. Instead, we are totally dependent on another for our life. We cannot create our own birth. The gospel has the power to spark the life of faith when heard. We hear and our hearts are warmed to believe. Believing, we begin to change to align with the new realities that have been wrought by the radical coming of Jesus with His kingdom.

We must not sell the gospel short. It has taken many a shot from the enemy. Hell hates the gospel and will work to dilute it, distort it, and destroy it. Hell believes what we sometimes doubt: the

gospel is the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 1:16). Just preaching the gospel the way Jesus did will correct the faulty doctrines and the feeble faith of the church. We could stand to feed on the gospel more and more. We must get away from the myth that the gospel is elementary and we should hurry on to deeper things. It is foundational and transcendent. It sounds too good to be true, yet each time we hear an echo of it, our hearts jump with new life.

Since Jesus is now Lord and Christ, we shall let Him define the gospel for us. His version is right.



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