

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

DECEMBER 2025 | MARK 1:14-15

*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*

WHAT REALLY IS THE GOSPEL?

One of the words in our culture that has been diluted with its over use is ***gospel***. Any reader of Scripture knows it means *good news*. But through the years it has been used to refer to any good news. You can get almost as many definitions of the word as the number of people you ask. Before we get into a deeper discussion as to what it really means, we should ask: *Why is it important?*

The apostle Paul, who gave us much of the New Testament scripture through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us that the gospel is the "power of God for salvation for everyone who believes..." (Romans 1:16, ESV). In that context, he makes it clear that the gospel is the only power for salvation. That puts it into a unique category. If the salvation of any or all of humankind is

dependent on it, it becomes very important to know what it is and how to access it.

There is another reason we should give priority to understanding the gospel: It is a target of Hell's strategy like no other. The gospel is so powerful and threatening to darkness, Hell continues to attack it with every deception possible. The first definition of the gospel that I had as a young man was that it was a ticket to heaven. There was a price I had to pay for the ticket that involved believing some facts, praying a prayer, and being baptized. I later heard Bible students discussing it, and they seemed to believe that the gospel was a legal status that was recorded in eternity's courthouse. The narrative seemed to be that God has a book where all the legal transactions are recorded, and no one knows for sure until we get

to the pearly gates what side of the ledger he or she is on. Another definition of the gospel is related to rewards for doing good deeds and punishments for doing bad deeds. Then there is the version that focuses on new birth. Being born again becomes the primary goal. Another widely accepted myth is that the Christian Gospel is but one of many ways to God's heaven. After all, God would never be exclusive and limit the way to heaven to only one way (even though Jesus Himself said so.)

So since any of these descriptions of ***gospel*** involves the idea of salvation, we need to pause and define the salvation that the gospel produces. What is biblical salvation? Is it just going to heaven when we die? No! It is so much more. Is it freedom from political or economic oppression? No! It is so much more. Is it some form of mystic state of the mind where peace and harmony are achieved? No! It is so much more. So, what is salvation? The apostle John in his gospel account gives the most understandable answer:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:30-31, ESV

The word "life" in this passage is not the normal word we would use for biological life. It refers to a different kind of life. It is

called "eternal life." It is the life that Jesus lived while on earth. It is the capacity for doing what humans want to do, but can't. It is not limited by boundaries of the temporal. It is stronger than death, and it displaces evil. Salvation transfers the believer from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. It makes God's sons out of his enemies. It removes the stain of sin that came through the rebellion of Adam and Eve. It gives unshakable hope to the human heart, and it guarantees final restoration to all creation.

So what could make such a salvation possible? In the early part of Mark's gospel, we find Jesus coming out of obscurity with a message: the gospel of God. The one true ***gospel***:

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

This text gives us four dynamics of the irreducible gospel. We must not exclude or ignore any of them. Together, they are the good news from heaven that produces salvation. Any one of them without the others is an incomplete message.

First, the gospel is an announcement. Not a proposition. Not a formula. Not a guide. Not an ideology. Not a call to action. It is an announcement that something has

happened that affects everything. It is likened to the voice that came from God in the beginning. In fact, John's gospel account begins the same way as Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word..." John continues and explains that Jesus Himself is the Word and that He is the life of grace and light of the world. Alongside the first announcement that created all things comes the announcement that a new creation has come. God did not consult with us about His plan or its timing. He acted out of His own graciousness and did for us what we could never do for ourselves. It is done - an accomplished reality. We have trouble with announcements when our flesh desires a checklist to accomplish instead.

Second, the gospel has a fulfillment dynamic. The gospel announcement is the climax of a long story that has pointed toward the Hero and His actions on our behalf. This dynamic connects the Old Testament to the New. It explains the role of all the characters in the story that began in Eden, including Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and John the Baptist. It makes it plain that the old covenant was temporal and that Israel's role was fulfilled by the one Israelite who obeyed the covenant in full. It excludes any two-tier structure for the people of God. There are not two peoples of God on earth, Israel and the Church. There is one people made up of all those of any nation who believe in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the world. It denies the postponement of the kingdom of God on earth. We are not waiting for the kingdom to come after a secret rapture. The time

has been fulfilled. All the promises, predictions, prophecies, types, and shadows of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. We are living in the benefits of the climax of the story that occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We no longer hope for a Savior from heaven. He has come. We no longer cower under the rule of the devil. His head has been crushed on the cross, and we are in the kingdom of the One who conquered death. We live in that victory, awaiting only the final appearance of the redeeming Lord who will restore justice to the universe, renew order to His creation, and resurrect bodies to His own.

Third, the gospel is connected to the kingdom of God. The prophet Daniel had much to say about the various kingdoms that existed in his day and the ones that would follow. He even gave a sort of timeline with his 70 weeks of years. He told of how Babylon would be defeated by Persia. How Persia would fall to Greece. How Rome would rule after Greece. And how the eternal kingdom of God would replace all of these with a power the world had never seen. All of original creation knew about the power to kill. That is how nations ruled. The kingdom that would defeat all others has the power to give life. The power of unconditional, undefeatable love had never been seen clearly until God became a man in Jesus and gave His life as a ransom. This kingdom is here now. Its king sits at the right hand of God Almighty. He sent His Spirit to indwell His people. They have His authority to push back darkness with the light of truth and to enforce the victory won

at the cross over the devil and His forces. They are a family with God as Father, a nation with Jesus as King, an army with love as its artillery, and a worshipping assembly forevermore.

Fourth, the gospel demands a decision.

Once the announcement is heard, we must accept it as reality or deny it. We can't just tolerate it as a "maybe." Repentance is changing one's mind to another point of view. Reality was once defined in a certain way, but now it is seen in a completely different way. A changed mind ultimately changes behavior. For example, If you believe someone has left you an inheritance, you will change your schedule to claim it. If you believe you have a new life that is capable of loving instead of hating, your behavior and words and priorities will change. Note the difference in gospel repentance and religious repentance. Religion requires change in order to get what is offered. Gospel repentance exemplifies change because of the gift that has been accepted. Jesus qualified for us. We get what He deserves because He got what we deserve. We could never change enough to meet the conditions of holiness. He already has. He gives us His own holiness as we share His life. Those who remain in a lifestyle of shame, guilt, fear, and dissatisfaction reveal they don't yet know the joy of sharing His life of peace, plenty, and purpose.

So, what is the New Testament ***gospel*** that Jesus brought and why is it important? It is the announcement that Jesus has come and fulfilled every hope humans have for life

and peace. He inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth. He rules from the place of authority and has shared that authority with His own people. He has also given them the Spirit that raised Him from the dead. He rules through His people as they work together as a body and community, baptized as a witness of being in Christ, worshiping together as a community of faith, sharing their gifts with each other, and responding to Jesus as the head of the church and Lord of the world.

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