

The good news of Easter  
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Did you read in the Onion this past week that the best decade to grow up in was the 80s? Look, you can't argue with facts. Being born in the 70's, by the time the 80's rolled around I was in my prime formative years. I consider myself blessed. Knight Rider. Parachute Pants. Magic vs. Larry. I could crawl anywhere I wanted in a moving car. And the movies... classics. Ferris Bueller's Day Off. Ghostbusters. Teenwolf. Goonies. You can't get better. Try and improve on The Princess Bride; there's no way. There are so many great lines in that movie; one line Inigo Montoya says to Vizzini is, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

You know, that could be said to a lot of people considering how they think of Christianity. There seems to be a growing ignorance of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to believe in Jesus even from people who say they do. Everybody knows enough to want Jesus on their side, but nobody really knows what Jesus said or did. We have these holidays like Easter and Christmas that have some religious significance, so we give a brief nod of recognition and then move on not really know what they are about. And lost in it all is what these things actually mean. Who actually is Jesus? What did he do? What is his message? And what does it mean to *believe* or *follow* Jesus? So, that's my goal this morning. If I could kindly be like an icon of the 80's, Inigo Montoya, and say, "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means" allow me to tell the story, the true story, of Jesus Christ and the events of Easter. Nothing is more important in life (READ 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

Do you see that word *gospel* in vs. 1? That's going to be our key word this morning. Gospel means good news; the kind of good news that changes everything. The author of this passage, a guy named Paul, is describing this good news. In fact, he flat out says it in vs 1, "I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you." Let me tell you about this good news again; let me remind you of it. And then Paul highlights two things. He explains what this good news is and what you're supposed to do with it (REPEAT). That's pretty important; if you want the fog to lift, if you want a greater understanding of this Jesus stuff, learn what the gospel is and what you're supposed to do with it.

Paul starts explaining what is the gospel in vs. 3. I want to highlight 5 key aspects of this good news from these verses. I believe what these verses tell us about the good news of God, the good news of Christianity, is the most important news you'll ever hear. After I do this, I'll show you what this passage tells us we're supposed to do about it, but first, look and see what this good news is.

**1. It's not about you, it's about Christ.** Can you see how this good news isn't about you? Right away in vs. 3 we read, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins." This message, this gospel, this good news is about Christ.

He's the subject. He's the actor. He's the star. It's not about you. You are not the focal point of this message. Someone else is.

In a "put yourself first" "nobody is more important than you" world, this is a pretty radical message. It completely reshapes your life. The "me-first" mentality all around us is normal; there's nothing new to that. What is relatively new (new in the last 2 decades or so) is the encouragement to be me-first. We encourage this kind of me-first thinking everywhere. In schools. In counseling offices. You hear it a lot in talk shows. And you even hear it in some churches. It almost sounds right. Isn't God for us? Doesn't he want the best for us? God doesn't want us feeling bad, does he? But here's a big problem: it doesn't work. People only have self-esteem problems the more they keep looking at themselves in the mirror. The more we are told to pay attention to ourselves the more we have problems with ourselves. God didn't make us or the universe this way. God didn't put us at the center of life; he put himself. He's the focal point of life, not you or me.

The first thing you need to know about God's gospel, God's good news, is that it's all about Jesus Christ. He's the focal point; he's the center. Life is about him. There's this great passage about Jesus in Col. 1; notice how this passage says everything that I'm saying now, that Jesus is the center of life (READ Col. 1:15-18). By him. In him. Through him. For him. All of life is about Jesus. And then at the end we read that he is *preeminent* in everything. We have a lot to get to this morning so I can't talk more about this, but friends, learn this lesson: life is about God, it's not about you. You won't lose your purpose when you remove yourself from the center and put Jesus at the center, you'll find it.

**2. It addresses our problem.** The problem is described in a phrase in vs. 3, "that Christ died *for our sins*." Let's talk about what that means.

Sin is coming up short; it's failing to measure up to God's law. It's missing God's mark. Years ago, up at Camp Forest Springs, Korby picked up a bow and did some archery with the boys. I don't think she had ever tried much archery before that her entire life. She fumbled with the arrows; she took a little longer than most people at the range. Everybody was waiting for her to finish up so they could go check their score. I don't know if she felt the pressure, but with two arrows left and everybody's eyeballs watching her she pulled back the bow, released and... BOOM... bullseye. She got some cheers. But was it a lucky shot? She pulls back a second time... BOOM... she pulled a Robin Hood... bullseye. Everybody nearby erupted with Ooos and Ahhs. Here's the proof (PIC).

We never hit the mark of God's glory. We can never meet God's standard. We're always off; we always miss. I'm guessing it's not hard for you to remember times this very week that you missed God's mark. You disobeyed your mom and dad; you were dishonest at school or work; you blew up at your kids; your thoughts were anything but pure. We sin. Romans 3:23 says, "for all have sinned and fall short of [miss the mark of] the glory of God." If you protest and say, "But I don't sin as much as this guy over here," but that's not the standard; God's law is the standard.

James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

The rest of this sermon, and really, how serious you take message of Jesus Christ when you leave here today, hinges on whether you understand, whether you believe, you are guilty of breaking God’s law and it’s your biggest problem. If you don’t think your guilt is that big of a deal, this message is going to be boring and you’re going to leave here today wondering what’s the big deal about Jesus and Easter. But if God gives you eyes to see that your sin is a much bigger problem than you realize then you are going to care about what you hear.

Let me put it to you this way: the moment you and I pass from this life we’re not going to a beautiful, dewy meadow with a summer breeze, we’re not going to the eternal man-cave in the sky with TVs, video games and an endless supply of buffalo wings; we’re not going to an amusement park... we’re going to a courtroom. We’re going to be ushered in front of a judge. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” That’s not good news because we are guilty. That’s our problem.

**3. Jesus died for our sin.** I know it’s depressing to think about our sin and if that was the end of the story, it wouldn’t be worth telling. But there’s more. Look at that phrase in vs. 3 again, “*that Christ died* for our sins.” So, God did something for our sin problem. And this says Jesus died for our sin. What does that mean?

There’s this amazing verse in 2 Cor. 5; it goes like this (vs. 21), “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Let’s give this verse it’s due attention because it’s so important.

First, there are two *hes* or *hims*. The first one is God the Father; the second one is Jesus Christ. God the Father made Jesus to be sin. If you went to a Good Friday service you most likely recounted the story, the events of Jesus’ death on a cross. He was falsely charged, he was unfairly tried, he was wrongly sentenced and cruelly punished; and eventually, he was killed, executed on a cross. It’s an ugly, sad story. But what man and the power of darkness meant for evil, God meant for good. None of the suffering that Jesus experienced was by accident. It was all planned by God. Acts 2:23 says, “this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” Why would God do that? Why would God plan such a painful sequence of events? Because of what 2 Cor. 5 is telling us. In that cruel, but planned death, God the Father took all the sin of the world and punished it in the body of Jesus Christ on the cross. There’s this great exchange that takes place at the cross. God takes all the sin of everyone who believes in him and puts it on Jesus, and then he takes everything perfect and pure and clean in Jesus and gives it to those who follow him. Why does God do that? Because he loves us. For our sake, it says, God did this, so we can become the righteousness of God. But God did more.

**4. Jesus was raised from the dead.** 1 Cor. 15 doesn't just say Jesus died; it also says he was resurrected. Vs. 4 says, "that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day." This Sunday morning, Easter morning, is ultimately the celebration that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. This isn't some metaphorical, spiritual reference to some religious victory. This is a bonafide resurrection. Did you notice how specific Paul gets about who saw the resurrected Jesus? Vs. 5-8 is simply a big list of people who saw Jesus alive, resurrected, after he died and was buried. Cephas saw him (that's Peter). Then all 12 of Jesus' disciples saw him. He appeared to a group of 500 people. James saw him. All the other apostles saw him. And so did Paul. This really happened. Jesus Christ died, was buried for three days, but was resurrected from the dead with a renewed body... the kind of body you and I will all get if we trust in Jesus.

The reason why Jesus' resurrection is such a big deal to the story is that it validates everything Jesus said would happen. If Jesus simply died and wasn't resurrected, we'd all be left wondering: is it really going to happen? Is God really going to win? Are we going to be saved? Will our sins be forgiven? How would we know? Jesus died... it doesn't look like he won. When Jesus burst forth from that grave alive he answered all those questions. Yes, God is going to win! Yes, we are going to be saved! Yes, we will be forgiven! We know everything God promised is going to happen because Jesus was raised from the dead. That's why Easter is such a big deal. It's the proof our faith needs.

**5. It's all according to the scriptures.** One last detail to the story. Did you notice how Paul states that phrase, "in accordance with the scriptures" two times; almost back to back? He's trying to tell us something. Here's what he's saying: these things all happened just like God said they would. This was the plan; this was the promise. This isn't by accident. God's not pulling out a late-inning win. No. Everything that's happening is just like God said it would. Do you know how that helps you and me? God's got everything under control. None of this is some crazy idea of man. Right there, in a black and white, this is exactly what God said would happen.

So, that's the story; that's the 20 minute version of God's message about Jesus. What are we supposed to do with it? Just look what the Corinthians did with this message.

The first thing they did was **receive it**. Do you see that in vs. 1? "Now I would remind you , brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received." Paul offered it as the greatest gift from God (the message of God's love for sinners by forgiving them of their sins) and they took it, they received it. How did they do that?

In John 1 the Apostle John writes (John 1:12-13), "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Do you see how *receiving Jesus* is described as *believing in his name*? That's how you receive Jesus and the forgiveness he has for our sins; we believe in in his name. This believing isn't merely agreeing with your mind; it's not like believing 2+2=4. It's a full embrace of Jesus with your body, mind and soul. In fact, you can't believe or receive without a miracle happening in your life. It's impossible to believe without a

miracle from God. Do you see who believes? The people who believe aren't the one's who were born into families who believe, they are not the one's who make up their own mind whether they will be Christians or not and other people can't decide for them either. The one's who believe are the one's who have been born of God; the one's who become children of God "were born, not of blood (family connections) nor of the will of the flesh (you're own decision and will power) nor the will of man (by the decision or force of another), but of God." It's a God-thing.

Has a God-thing happened to you? Have you experienced an awakening that can only be described as divine? Nobody becomes a follower of Jesus, nobody loves this message, without God doing a supernatural work in their life making them believe. To love God, to cherish God, to love this message, to turn to Jesus as your only hope is a work of God. Only the work of God can produce a life-change like this. You will only turn away from the life you have been living and turn to Jesus as your greatest treasure if God makes you born again - that turning is called repentance. Has a God-thing happened; is a God-thing happening? It must happen to receive him.

Secondly, Paul says the gospel is something you **stand in**. Do you see that also in vs. 1? "Which you received, in which you stand." Standing in this gospel message is a reference to our ongoing need to believe and trust in Jesus. Every day. Believing in Jesus, repenting and turning from sin isn't just a one-time thing. It's day by day.

Saying the gospel is something we stand in as well as receive implies something about this world we already know intuitively; it implies something we already feel. Life is hard. When our body breaks down due to age, due to sickness, life is hard. Our work doesn't always produce the results we want. Our relationships get messy; so messy we want to give up sometimes. We try to do the right thing, but it doesn't always work. What's going to keep you standing when life gets hard? What's going to keep you upright and hopeful when life is hard; when things don't work? Paul says if the gospel, this message of God's love, will keep you standing.

God has rigged this world with frustration and pain. He did this on purpose so you would look for something to stand on. That something is supposed to be the gospel. Of course, because we're sinners and because we miss the mark we try to stand in other things. God is here to tell you this morning: receive the gospel and then stand in it.

One more we do with the gospel. We receive the gospel. We stand in the gospel. And by the gospel we are being saved if **you hold fast to it**. Hold fast means to remain steadfast in it. To persevere in it. Imagine you've got a recital coming up at the end of the school year. Or maybe you have a science project due at the end of the semester. It's huge. It counts for more than half your grade. If you stick to it, If you keep persevering, you'll make it. But if you quit, if you take your foot off the pedal or get distracted, your toast. That's kind of like holding fast. Keep persevering in Jesus. Keep trusting, keep believing. And as you do you'll be saved.

That's what the Corinthians did with the gospel; they received it, they stand in it and they held fast to it. What will you do with it? If we receive the gospel, if we stand in it, if we hold fast to it and not give up, we can walk out of that courtroom forgiven men and women. That's the love of God; Jesus Christ coming, dying and rising from the dead so we can be forgiven men and women. But will we receive, stand and hold fast to Jesus?