

**“Created for Good”**  
***Sermon Series – What is the Gospel?***  
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**First Presbyterian Church Winston-Salem, NC**  
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**(Mk. 1:14-15; Gen. 1: 1-3,26-28,30b-31)**

**Introduction.**

When I was a young believer, the people in the Christian circles in which I ran were very earnest about sharing their faith, and I remember going through training classes on evangelism and learning how to share the gospel. In those early years, I learned some effective tools to use when telling people about Jesus, and I found them very helpful in many ways.

For example, in one of the classes, we were taught to ask two very probing questions whenever we had a conversation with someone about spiritual matters. The questions were, “If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven? And if God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’ what would you say?” Questions like these made a person think about their eternal destiny.

Over the years as I grew more in my understanding of the Christian faith, I began to wonder: Is the gospel simply about getting into heaven and staying out of hell, or is there more to the gospel than simply offering someone “fire insurance”? Why did Jesus say the gospel is Good News, and what are the implications of it for daily living? And how do those implications work themselves out in tackling the problems we face in the world around us?

In my early years as a young Christian, whenever someone talked about the gospel it always referred to sharing one’s faith and the plan of salvation. However, I’ve come to realize that there is so much more to the gospel than what the Bible teaches about the plan of salvation. The gospel actually has cosmic implications which are as big as the world, and it involves so much more than just me and my salvation. Let me explain what I mean.

**I. The Gospel is Good News.**

Jesus’ first words in the book of Mark announced the impending arrival of God’s reign on earth, and He said, “*The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news*” (Mk. 1:15). The word that is translated “good news” in this passage is the Greek word *euangelion*, and it comes from two Greek words – *eu*, meaning “good” and *angelion*, which means “news” or “story.” *Euangelion* can also be translated as “gospel,” and it’s a word that has a rich history which has both pagan and Jewish roots.

Regarding its pagan background, at the time of Christ whenever a king or an emperor ascended to power, it was said that this new beginning was marked by good news, or *euangelion*. For example, there is an inscription which was written in 27 BC just before the birth of Jesus which heralded what was hoped would be the benevolent reign of Caesar Augustus. It reads, “...the birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning of the *good news*”

(*euangelion*, the gospel) that came through him to the world.” It was an announcement that the reign of the emperor was going to usher in a whole new world order.

Jesus and the writers of the NT picked up on this use of the word, and they talked about the Good News of the arrival of the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus as His Messiah. The birth of Christ ushered in a whole new world order to an even greater extent than the birth of any emperor ever has or ever will. Imagine how the *good news*, or gospel, of Jesus’ birth must have been received by the political leaders in the Roman world in the first century!

The Jewish roots of the word “gospel” (*euangelion*) go back to when the people of Israel were in exile. It was a time of captivity when they had no immediate hope of restoration. Seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah wrote, “*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’*” (Isaiah 52:7). Isaiah’s message was that the hopeful return of God’s people to Zion and the restoration of His kingdom was the good news of God (Is. 40:1-11).

The prophet sums up this good news as “Our God reigns!” (52:7), and Isaiah looked ahead to the time when the Lord would establish His kingdom on earth. When Jesus came into the world proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom as the good news of God, Jewish people would have naturally expected the arrival of a great transformation that would happen in the world as a result.

Do you see how Jesus and the writers of the NT tapped into the expectations of both the Jewish people and the Romans when they announced the gospel concerning Jesus Christ? It was a revolutionary message, and it sent a reverberation wherever the good news of God’s reign in Christ was shared.

Sadly, many Christians don’t think they have very good news to tell. It’s easy to feel intimidated about sharing our faith, and we’re afraid that we’ll come across as holier-than-thou or irrelevant when talking about the gospel. Telling others the good news can feel like putting ourselves in front of a firing squad of rejection and shame. But if that is the case, it makes me wonder if we really possess deep down in our hearts what Jesus proclaimed as the gospel in the first place. When Christ proclaimed the gospel, it must have felt like good news to the people who heard it. Otherwise, why did they respond in such transformational ways?

So what exactly did Jesus preach? What was the central message of His gospel? In Luke 4 Jesus preached His first sermon in His hometown of Nazareth. And there He quoted the prophesy in Isaiah 61 where it says, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news (there is that word again) to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” (Lk. 4:18,19). When Jesus finished reading this passage, He rolled up the scroll and said, “*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*” (Lk. 4:21).

If we present a gospel that is only concerned with the eternal destiny of a person’s soul after they die, then perhaps we’ve missed the mark. And if we only share a faith that ignores broken relationships and the injustices we see and experience in the world today, then we’re not sharing the whole gospel. Jesus’ message is about so much more than most of us realize, and it really is good news which has profound implications for the whole world.

## **II. The Gospel Begins with a World that was Designed for Good.**

If the gospel is the true story of God's good news, then we need to start at the beginning of the story. In the book of Genesis, we read the biblical account of the creation of the world, and it's clear from Scripture that when the world was made it was designed for good. On multiple occasions in the book of Genesis we're told that six times God looked at what He had made and said, "It is good."

But God saved His highest affirmation of creation for human beings. In Genesis 1:31 we read that after God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, the Bible says He looked at them and the rest of creation and said, "It is very good." Human beings were the crowning act of God's creation, and we're the only creatures on the planet which have been made in the image of God.

The Bible says that God loved the people He made, and He wanted to be with them. And they wanted to be with Him too. From the beginning Adam and Eve's relationship with God was designed to be one of mutual blessing, and everything in the world was intended to be based on love, peace, righteousness, and joy. It was a place of blessing for everyone and everything. What a wonderful world it was.

All of that changed with the decision of our first parents to disobey God. But that part of the story comes next week, and we don't want to get ahead of ourselves. In the beginning the world was created and designed for good.

What if our families were actually meant to be places of love and support? What if we had friendships with people who never hurt or betray us? What if there were no wars in the world, everyone lived in peace, and people worked together for the betterment of everyone? What if there was no injustice, crime, or hatred? What if people of every color were treated fairly? And what if there was no poverty, sickness, war, or death?

We all yearn for a world like that, don't we? Deep down we wish it was true. And it was true once. It happened back then, and it was the world as it was intended to be. Life was fair, and people didn't take advantage of each other. We took care of the planet, and it took care of us.

The best part of all was that people had a right relationship with God, and He came walking in the cool of the evening every day to spend time with our first parents. Adam and Eve weren't afraid of the Lord, and they didn't use their relationship with God to twist His arm to do for them what they wanted. Instead, they glorified God, and they were prepared to enjoy Him forever. That was their chief end in life, and it felt to them like it was the most natural thing in the world to do, because it brought them so much joy and pleasure.

Always remember that the world was created and designed for good, and anytime you see hate, experience injustice, or witness people being exploited, realize that this isn't the way the world was intended to be. And it breaks God's heart to see what has happened with the world He created.

Could it be that the Lord has left an echo of His original design in every human heart? Is it possible that the longing in each of us is for a home we lost a long time ago?

### **III. Longing for Home.**

Whether we realize it or not, and whether we want to admit it or not, I think our longing for home is a welling up from the soul which has been placed there by God. It's a trace of God in our lives that goes all the way back to the home which was lost in the Garden of Eden, and it is basic to the story of the Bible.

Adam and Eve longed for paradise after they were banished from the Garden because of their disobedience. Abraham left his home in order to find a Promised Land the Lord pledged to give him. The exiled Hebrews longed for Palestine while they languished in captivity in the foreign country of Babylon. And the prodigal son longed to return to his father's house after he squandered his inheritance while living in the far country.

The entire record of Scripture tells the story of men and women roaming from one place to another, from one experience to the next, unable to be at home where they were, and uncertain if they would ever find what they were looking for. It's like the song Bono sings with the band U2, "I don't think I've found what I'm looking for." Do you resonate with that statement?

Larry Crabb is a Christian psychologist and author. In one of his books he writes, "Beneath the surface of everyone's life, especially the more mature, is an ache that will not go away. It can be ignored, disguised, mislabeled, or submerged by a torrent of activity, but it will not disappear. We were designed to enjoy a better world than this. And until that better world comes along, we will groan for what we do not have. An aching soul is evidence not of neurosis or spiritual immaturity, but of realism."

What does Larry Crab mean by a "world better than this?" What he means is that, from a spiritual point of view, ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God and were banished from the Garden of Eden, we have been longing for a home that we lost. You and I were created to be at home with God, and until we are, something will always be missing. Friends, that's the gospel, and it is a message of good news for everyone single person.

### **Conclusion.**

Many years ago, the late British pastor and theologian John Stott was asked to speak at a conference on evangelism. During a Q&A time, he was asked, "Dr. Stott, what is the irreducible minimal gospel?" The famous pastor thought for a moment, and then he replied, "Friend, I don't want an irreducible minimal gospel. I want the *whole* gospel!"

So do I, and I hope you do too. Do you know, understand, and believe the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, or is what you know and believe merely a truncated version of it? As we study these wonderful truths the next four weeks, I pray that the Lord will open up new vistas to each of us and take us deeper into the heart of God and deeper into an understanding of the whole gospel which the Bible teaches. If we come to understand the whole gospel, and if we live in the light of what it truly means, an amazing transformation of blessing and joy awaits us. I guarantee it. I look forward to making this journey with you. To God be the glory! Amen.