

Greetings Redeemer family!

Let's start with a pop quiz. Grab a piece of paper, write your name at the top. Now, answer one question: "What is the Gospel?"

This is the way my Evangelism professor would begin his class each semester. I became very familiar with this ritual, as one of my (many!) part-time jobs in seminary was working as a teaching assistant for this class. The various reactions of the students were classic. Some would stare blankly at their page, as though waiting for the perfect definition to suddenly seep out of the white space and appear in bold, black ink. Others would begin furiously scribbling, in vain hopes of writing out the entire book of Galatians within the allotted time. Being in Orlando and near the national headquarters of Campus Crusade for Christ, we'd also have a few students that would begin drawing trains and circles with chairs and dots and crosses. But most students would write a sentence, and then tap their pen on the page, unsatisfied but unsure what else to say.

Those one-sentence answers were usually all very similar: "Jesus died to save sinners and give them eternal life." But is that really it? The students would continue to stare at their pages, knowing that there had to be something more. How could you boil down all of the promises of Scripture? How do you summarize the Good News of Jesus Christ? How do you express all that we lost in Adam's Fall, and all that we stand to gain in the restored New Creation?

One helpful metaphor is to see the Gospel as a precious jewel, expertly crafted and cut. As you inspect it from different angles, the light shines and refracts in different ways. Each of these perspectives unveils a unique beauty and mystery of the jewel. Our service this week expands on this theme. Mike will be leading us as we explore the different facets of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As I planned this service, I began to think about the different ways the Gospel moves us from one status to another: from bondage to freedom, guilt to righteousness, death to life. The songs and prayers this week focus on these transformations that come as benefits of the Gospel.

Our call to worship from Psalm 145 sets the stage for these benefits of the Gospel. The Psalmist celebrates the greatness of our God, and the many blessings that He pours out on His people:

*Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.
All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you.
They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might,
so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.
My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.*

The first transformation that we celebrate in our service is the transformation from serving dead idols to worshipping the true, living God. An idol can be anything we place our trust and hope and worth in. It could be another person, a job, a social status, even ourselves. But these created things can never hold the worth that we place in them. They'll never live up to our expectations. As we chase after them, we find them empty and lifeless. Only the Creator God is truly worthy of worship and honor. He is strong enough to sustain our hopes in the midst of hardship. He is the overflowing spring of vibrant life.

*May our homes be filled with dancing
May our streets be filled with joy
May injustice bow to Jesus
As the people turn and pray*

*From the mountain to the valley
Hear our praises rise to You
From the heavens to the nations
Hear our singing fill the air*

Similarly, the Gospel takes us from anarchy and tyranny to the hope of a new king. Some of us have known the tyranny of living for something that cared nothing for your welfare. It may be a company that is unfair in the way it treats its employees. It may be an addiction that ravages your body, yet demands satisfaction. It may be a parent whose expectations were perfection, and nothing you did was ever good enough. And some of us have labored in the wilderness of anarchy, alone with no direction and no peace. In the Gospel, we declare the Jesus is Lord, the true king of our lives. He has defeated all His and our enemies through the victory of His cross. He promises to rule over our lives, calling us into the life of His eternal kingdom of peace.

*Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore;
Rejoice, give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

*His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o'er earth and Heav'n,
The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv'n;
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

*He sits at God's right hand till all His foes submit,
And bow to His command, and fall beneath His feet:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*

*Rejoice in glorious hope! Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take His servants up to their eternal home.
We soon shall hear th'archangel's voice;
The trump of God shall sound, rejoice!*

The Gospel offers us freedom from fear. The most repeated command in Scripture is not tithing or telling the truth or sexual purity, although all of these things are important. The most repeated command of Scripture is: "Do not fear." For many of us, fear is the narrative of our lives. We work incessantly to avoid the dreaded "what if" scenario. We build walls and strategies to keep uncertainty at bay, dreading that something in the world might be out of our sphere of control. In the Gospel, we realize that we were never in control to begin with. Rather, the sovereign God is working all things together for good. All that He does is directed by His goodness and love. In love, He calls His children by name, saying "do not fear."

*When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you,
And the waves will not overcome you.
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you,
I have called you by name,
You are Mine.*

*For I am the Lord your God
(I am the Lord your God)
I am the Lord your God (I am)
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior
I am the Lord (do not fear)*

Our confession of faith this week expands on the comfort of the Gospel, which sets us free from all fear. This answer from the Heidelberg Catechism does a wonderful job of outlining the promises of the Gospel, and their practical significance in our daily lives. The truths expressed here are worth meditating on this weekend as you prepare for worship.

*1. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?
A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul,
both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.
He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood,
and has set me free from all the power of the devil.
He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father
not a hair can fall from my head;
indeed, all things must work together for my salvation.
Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life
and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.*

The Gospel is not only the opportunity for reconciliation with God, but also the chance to be reconciled with one another. God did not simply pluck individual sinners out of the world. Instead, He called a new people to Himself by grace. The common work of the Holy Spirit unites us as brothers and sisters of our Heavenly Father.

We celebrate our peace with God and with one another through an ancient tradition called “the Passing of the Peace.” It is an interactive opportunity to encourage one another in the promises of the Gospel. In this tradition, you turn to your neighbor, shake their hand, and say “Peace be with you.” Your neighbor responds, “and also with you.”

The Gospel also gives us the hope of new hope in our lives. This world is full of sorrows and hardships, but Christ promises that these things are not final. They will come to an end. There is a better kingdom coming. No thief can steal and no army can destroy this inheritance. Every sad thing will become untrue.

*On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.
All o'er those wide extended plains,*

*Shines one eternal day;
There God the Son forever reigns,
And scatters night away.*

*I am bound (I am bound)
I am bound (I am bound)
I am bound for promised land.*

After hearing so many promises of the Gospel, being reminded of the overflowing goodness of our God towards His people, we respond with a simple song that has been echoed through the church for centuries. We join our voices with the sound of all creation, worshipping the God who rules over all things with wisdom and love. His is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Amazed by grace that saved a wretch like me,

Tim Sharpe
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