

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 1  
18\* And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.19\* “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,20\* teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

As we begin, let me note that much in this message is taken from ideas put forth by Mark Dever, D. A. Carson, John Stott others and my own.

Apologetics can present wonderful opportunities for evangelism. Being willing to engage in conversations about where we came from or what's wrong with this world can be a significant way to introduce honest discussions about the gospel.

By far the greatest danger in apologetics is being distracted from the main message. Evangelism is not defending the virgin birth or defending the historicity of the resurrection. Apologetics is defending the faith, answering the questions others have about Christianity. It is responding to the agenda that others set. Evangelism, however, is following Christ's agenda, the news about him. Evangelism is the positive act of telling the good news about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through him.

One of the most common and dangerous mistakes in evangelism is to misinterpret the results of evangelism—the conversion of unbelievers—for evangelism itself, which is the simple telling of the gospel message. Who can deny that much modern evangelism has become emotionally manipulative, seeking simply to cause a momentary decision of the sinner's will, yet neglecting the biblical idea that conversion is the result of the supernatural, gracious act of God toward the sinner?

When we are involved in a program in which converts are quickly counted, decisions are more likely pressed, and evangelism is gauged by its immediately obvious effect, we are involved in undermining real evangelism and real churches.

The Christian call to evangelism is a call not simply to persuade people to make decisions but rather to proclaim to them the good news of salvation in Christ, to call

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 2  
them to repentance, and to give God the glory for regeneration and conversion. We don't fail in our evangelism if we faithfully tell the gospel to someone who is not converted; we fail only if we don't faithfully tell the gospel at all. Evangelism itself isn't converting people; it's telling them that they need to be converted and telling them how they can be. Mark Dever

So what is the Gospel? It could be formatted in this way.

The content of the gospel is briefly given in Mark 1:15: 'The time has come. The kingdom of God is near.' So also is the conclusion to be drawn: 'Repent and believe the gospel.'

Thus the gospel is not, in the first instance, the call to repentance and faith; rather, the gospel is the joyous news that grounds the call to repentance and faith. This good news is that the long awaited kingdom, the kingdom of God, is inaugurated.

Although 'kingdom' can refer to the unlimited sovereignty of God, or to the realm of a particular king, in the NT the word more commonly refers to that invasive aspect of God's sovereignty under which there is eternal life. Everyone is under the kingdom in the first sense, ie. under God's sovereignty, whether they like it or not; only those who have passed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13), those who have been born from above (John 3:3, 5), are under or in the kingdom in the dominant NT sense.

If the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom, it is no less, as we have seen, the gospel of God regarding his Son (Romans chapter 1). There is no conflict between these two designations, and both drive us to focus on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King, whose utterly extraordinary mission was to die the odious death of an accursed wretch, in fulfilment of OT patterns and pictures and prophecies of sacrifice. The good news that focuses on Jesus and his cross-work was anticipated, according to Paul, two thousand years earlier in the promises given to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), and repeatedly promised in the scriptures (Romans 1:2).

1:18–2:5). 'Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel' (2 Timothy 2:8). The gospel is this 'word of truth' (Ephesians 1:13). However hidden this gospel might be to unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4) and to those who try to control it by demands for supernatural proofs and demonstrations of excellent speaking abilities and worldly wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21–23), Paul knew that the secret of this gospel's power lay in the message of the cross, brought by the Spirit. His aim was to preach in such a way that people were not swayed by his eloquence and rhetoric; he wanted to preach 'with a demonstration of the Spirit's power' so that his hearers' faith 'might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power' (2:4–5). Paul knew that God himself had chosen the Thessalonian converts because his gospel came to them not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

So much is power an accompaniment of this gospel that Paul can insist the gospel *is* 'the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes' (Romans 1:16). This gospel discloses a righteousness from God that is appropriated by faith (1:17), a righteousness inextricably tied to Christ's sacrifice, by which God demonstrated his justice while justifying the ungodly (3:21–26).

Thus the gospel is integrally tied to the Bible's story-line. Indeed, it is incomprehensible without understanding that story-line. God is the sovereign, transcendent and personal God who has made the universe, including us, his image-bearers. Our misery lies in our rebellion, our alienation from God, which, despite his forbearance, attracts his implacable wrath. But God, precisely because love is of the very essence of his character, takes the initiative and prepared for the coming of his own Son by raising up a people who, by covenantal stipulations, temple worship, systems of sacrifice and of priesthood, by kings and by prophets, are taught something of what God is planning and what he expects. In the fullness of time his Son comes and takes on human nature. He comes not, in the first instance, to judge but to save: he dies the death of his

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 4  
people, rises from the grave and, in returning to his heavenly Father, bequeaths the Holy Spirit as the down payment and guarantee of the ultimate gift he has secured for them—an eternity of bliss in the presence of God himself, in a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. The only alternative is to be shut out from the presence of this God forever, in the torments of hell. What men and women must do, before it is too late, is repent and trust Christ; the alternative is to disobey the gospel (Romans 10:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

One of the most persistent differences among believers during the past three hundred years, so far as the understanding of the gospel is concerned, is tied to the differences between Christians of Reformed conviction and those with Arminian or Wesleyan conviction. The former will think of the gospel as the good news of God taking action to save men and women by the death and resurrection of his Son; the latter will think of the gospel as the good news of God taking action to provide the possibility of salvation for men and women by the death and resurrection of his Son. Both sides will insist that repentance and faith are necessary; both will insist that repentance is human repentance, faith is human faith. But the Reformed believer will want to add that repentance and faith are brought about by God's elective grace, mediated by the Spirit, in those who believe; while the Wesleyan believer will want to add that, although prevenient grace( God does a work beforehand) is necessary for an individual to repent and believe, all human beings enjoy such prevenient grace, so that the ultimate distinction between believers and unbelievers cannot be assigned to God but only to the individuals themselves.

Boice puts it nicely:

“The true nature of the gospel also emerges in this understanding of the death of Jesus. The gospel is not just a new possibility for achieving joy and fullness in this life, as some seem to suggest. It is not just a solution to what were previously troublesome and frustrating problems. It is rather something much deeper that has been done, something relating to God, on the basis of which and only on the basis of

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 5  
which these other blessings of salvation follow. Packer says, ‘The gospel does bring us solutions to these problems, but it does so by first solving . . . the deepest of all human problems, the problem of man’s relation with his Maker; and unless we make it plain that the solution of these former problems depends on the settling of this latter one, we are misrepresenting the message and becoming false witnesses of God.’”

A. Eight summarizing words:

What Paul is going to talk about in these verses, he says, is “the gospel”: “Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you” (v. 1). “By this gospel you were saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you” (v. 2). Indeed, what Paul had passed on to them was “of first importance”—a rhetorically powerful way of telling his readers to pay attention, for what he is going to say about the gospel lies at its very center. These prefatory remarks completed, the first word that appears in Paul’s summary is “Christ”:

“I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins” and so forth. That brings me to the first of my eight summarizing words.

The gospel is Christological, it is Christ-centered. The point is powerfully made in every major New Testament book and corpus. In Matthew’s Gospel, for instance, Christ himself is Emmanuel, God with us; he is the long-promised Davidic king who will bring in the kingdom of God. Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father except through him, for it is the Father’s solemn intent that all should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. In the sermons reported in Acts, there is no name but Jesus given under heaven by which we must be saved (cf. Acts 4:12). In Romans and Galatians and Ephesians, Jesus is the last Adam, the one to whom the law and the prophets bear witness, the one who by God’s own design propitiates God’ wrath and reconciles Jews and Gentiles to his heavenly Father and thus also to each other. Paul does not tell his readers, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 6  
except Jesus Christ”; rather, he says, “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you  
except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

The gospel is theological. This is a short-hand way of affirming two things. First, as 1  
Corinthians 15 repeatedly affirms, God raised Christ Jesus from the dead (e.g. 5:15).  
More broadly, New Testament documents insist that God sent the Son into the world,  
and the Son obediently went to the cross because this was his Father’s will. It makes  
no sense to pit the mission of the Son against the sovereign purpose of the Father. If  
the gospel is centrally Christological, it is no less centrally theological.

Second, the text does not simply say that Christ died and rose again; rather, it asserts  
that “Christ died for our sins” and rose again. Sin and death are related to God  
in Scripture.

The gospel is biblical. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

The gospel is thus apostolic. Of course, Paul cheerfully insists that there were more  
than five hundred eyewitnesses to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless  
he repeatedly draws attention to the apostles: Jesus “appeared to Peter, and then  
to the Twelve” (15:5); “he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of  
all he appeared to me” (15:8), “the least of the apostles” The gospel is thus  
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to me” (15:8), “the least of the apostles” (15:9).

The gospel is historical. It’s truth s embedded in human history and revealed through  
a real person, who no denies really lived.

The gospel is personal. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not merely  
historical events; the gospel is not merely theological in the sense that it organizes  
a lot of theological precepts. It sets out the way of individual salvation, of personal

salvation. “Now, brothers,” Paul writes at the beginning of this chapter, “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved” (1 Cor 15:1-2). An historical gospel that is not personal and powerful is merely antiquarian; a theological gospel that is not received by faith and found to be transforming is merely abstract. In reality, the gospel is personal.

The gospel is universal. If we step farther into 1 Corinthians 15, we find Paul demonstrating that Christ is the new Adam (vv. 22, 47-50). The new humanity in him draws in people from every tongue and tribe and people and nation. The gospel is universal in this sense. It is not universal in the sense that it transforms and saves everyone without exception, for in reality, those whose existence is connected exclusively to the old Adam are not included. Yet this gospel is gloriously universal in its comprehensive sweep. There is not a trace of ethnic segregation here. The gospel is universal.

The gospel is eschatological. For instance, some of the blessings Christians receive today are essentially eschatological blessings, blessings belonging to the end, even if they have been brought back into time and are already ours. Already God declares his blood-bought, Spirit-regenerated people to be justified: the final declarative sentence from the end of the age has already been pronounced on Christ’s people, because of what Jesus Christ has done. We are already justified—and so the gospel is in that sense eschatological. Yet there is another sense in which this gospel is eschatological. In the chapter before us, Paul focuses on the final transformation: “I declare to you, brothers,” he says in vv. 50 and following, “that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality,

then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ It is not enough to focus narrowly on the blessings Christians enjoy in Christ in this age: the gospel is eschatological.

I Cor 15 tells us much about the Gospel.

(1) This gospel is normally spread by proclamation. This gospel, Paul say, “I preached to you” (1 Cor 15:1), and then adds that it is “the word I preached to you” (15:2). This way of describing the spreading of the gospel is typical of the New Testament. The gospel that was preached was what the Corinthians believed (15:11). Look up every instance of the word “gospel” and discover how often, how overwhelmingly often, this news of Jesus Christ is made known through proclamation, through preaching.

Earlier in this same letter Paul insists that in God’s unfathomable wisdom “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1:21). The content was “what was preached”; the mode of delivery was “what was preached.” There are plenty of texts that talk about the importance of being salt and light, of course, or of doing good to all people, especially those of the household of God, or of seeking the good of the city. Yet when dissemination of the gospel is in view, overwhelmingly the Bible specifies proclamation. The good news must be announced, heralded, explained; God himself visits and revisits human beings through his word. This gospel is normally spread by proclamation.

(2) This gospel is fruitfully received in authentic, persevering faith. “This is what we preach,” Paul writes, “and this is what you believed” (1 Cor 15:11). Toward the beginning of the chapter, Paul tells the Corinthians, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain” (15:2). In other words, their faith in the word Paul preached, in the gospel, must be of the persevering type. Many other passages carry the same emphasis. For instance, Paul tells the Colossians, “[God] has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you



Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 9  
continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (Col 1:22-23). This gospel is fruitfully received in authentic, persevering faith.

(3) A result is personal self-humiliation. When the gospel is properly understood and received in persevering faith, people properly respond the way the apostle does. Yes, the risen Christ appeared last of all to him (15:8). Yet far from becoming a source of pride, this final resurrection appearance evokes in Paul a sense of his own unworthiness: “For I am the least of the apostles,” he

writes, “and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am” (15:9-10). How could it be otherwise? Jesus had purchased Paul’s redemption at the cost of his own blood, he had graciously forgiven him of his sins, including the sin of persecuting the church of God, he had confronted the apostle on the Damascus Road and revealed himself to him at the very moment Paul was expanding his efforts to damage Christ’s people! Even if in the wake of his conversion, Paul confesses he has worked harder than the other apostles, he insists that this can only be true because of the grace of God that was with him (15:10). Humility, gratitude, dependence on Christ, confession of sin—these are the characteristic attitudes of the truly converted, the atmosphere out of which Christians experience joy and love. When the gospel truly does its work, “proud Christian” is a contradiction of terms. This gospel is properly disclosed in personal self-humiliation.

(4) This gospel is rightly asserted to be the central confession of the whole church. At numerous points in 1 Corinthians Paul reminds his readers that the Corinthian church is not the only church—or, better put, that there are many other churches with common beliefs and practices, such that at some point the independence of the Corinthians, far from being a virtue, is merely evidence that they are out of step. In 4:17, Paul tells them that Timothy will remind the Corinthians of Paul’s way of life, “which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church

Of course, what “the whole church” or “all the churches” are doing is not necessarily

Great Commission Passion pt4 New Covenant Baptist Fellowship Pastor Joseph Krygier May 31,2009 10  
right: One must test everything by Scripture. Moreover, one must grimly admit that there is a kind of traditionalism that loses its way that preserves form while sacrificing authenticity and power. In Corinth, however, that does not seem to have been the problem. Paul insists that the gospel is rightly asserted to be the central confession of the whole church. Always be suspicious of churches that proudly flaunt how different they are from what has gone before.

(5) The gospel is boldly advancing under the contested reign and inevitable victory of Jesus the king. This side of Jesus' death and resurrection, all of God's sovereignty is mediated exclusively through King Jesus. That is amply taught elsewhere in the New Testament, of course. Matthew concludes with Jesus' claim, "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:20). Philippians rejoices that "the name that is above every name" has been given to him (Phil 2:9-11). So also—and dramatically—here: Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (15:25). That presupposes the reign is still contested, and still advances. This is of a piece with Jesus' claim, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). But one day, the final enemy, death itself, will die, and Jesus' mediatorial kingship will end. God will be all in all (15:28).

It is in the light of this gospel—all that the death and resurrection of Jesus have achieved, all that the advancing kingdom of King Jesus is accomplishing, all that we will inherit in resurrection existence on the last day—that Paul writes to these Corinthian believers, and to us, and says, "Therefore my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (15:58). The gospel is boldly advancing under the contested reign and inevitable victory of Jesus the king.

Here is what is to be understood, believed, obeyed; here is what is promised, taught, explained.