



HEBRON

Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Dr. Landon Dowden

WHAT IS A HEALTHY CHURCH?

LESSON 4

A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL

I. INTRO QUESTIONS:

- a. From whom do you first remember hearing the Gospel?
- b. How often should we share the Gospel? (Psalm 96:2-3; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)
- c. How often do you share the Gospel? What, if anything, keeps you from sharing the Gospel more?
- d. Is the Gospel just for non-Christians? Why should we talk about the Gospel among believers as well or why, in our discipleship, should we not go past the Gospel but deeper into it?
- e. What questions do you have about the Gospel?

II. WHY DOES IT MATTER IF WE GET THE GOSPEL "RIGHT?"

- a. Foundation of our faith.
- b. Foundation of how we view God and ourselves.

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

- a. Anyabwile:
 - i. The greatest need in the world today is the Gospel . . . because men, women, and children are perishing without a vital knowledge of God through the good news of our Savior and his Son, Jesus.
 - ii. The greatest need in the church today is the Gospel . . . (because) it is the message that forms, sustains, and animates the church. Apart from the Gospel, the church has nothing to say – that is, nothing to say that cannot be said by some other human agency.
 - iii. The Gospel:
 1. Distinguishes the church from the world.
 2. Defines her message and mission in the world.
 3. Steels her people against the fiery darts of the evil one and the false allurements of sin.



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b. Dever:

- i. The Gospel is the heart of Christianity, and so it should be at the heart of our churches.
- ii. A healthy church is a church in which every member, young and old, mature and immature, unites around the wonderful good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- iii. Every text in the Bible points to the Gospel or some aspect of it.
- iv. A biblical understanding of the good news should inform every sermon, every act of baptism and communion, every song, every prayer, every conversation.
- v. More than anything else in the church's life, the members of a healthy church pray and long to know this Gospel more deeply.
- vi. Why? Because the hope of the Gospel is the hope of knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). It's the hope of seeing him clearly and knowing him fully, even as we are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:8). It's the hope of becoming like him as we see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

IV. THE GOSPEL IS NOT...

- a. Your testimony.
- b. God needs you.
- c. Everything will go your way in life if you become a Christian.
- d. Jesus wants to be your homeboy.
- e. The news that we are okay.
- f. Just the news that God is love.
- g. The news God has a wonderful plan or purpose for our life.

V. THE GOSPEL IS...

- a. Dever: The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died on the cross as a sacrificial substitute for sinners and rose again, making a way for us to be reconciled to God.
- b. Gospel = good news – *euangelion*
 - i. The announcement of what God has done for us in Jesus!
- c. God
 - i. Anyabwile: The Gospel or good news of Jesus Christ is that God the Father, who is holy and righteous in all his ways, is angry with sinners and will punish sin.
 - ii. Dever: Have I explained that God is our holy and sovereign creator?



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d. Man

- i. Anyabwile: Man, who disobeys the rule of God, is alienated from the love of God and is in danger of an eternal and agonizing condemnation at the hands of God.
- ii. Dever: Have I made it clear that we humans are a strange mixture, wonderfully made in God's image yet horribly fallen, sinful, and separated from him? Since we are condemned sinners, then, we need his forgiveness above all else. We need spiritual life. When we present the Gospel less radically, we simply ask for false conversions and increasingly meaningless church membership lists, both of which make the evangelization of the world around us more difficult.

e. Christ

- i. Anyabwile: God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love, sent his eternal Son born by the Virgin Mary, to die as a ransom and a substitute for the sins of rebellious people.
- ii. Dever: Have I explained who Jesus is and what he has done – that he is the God-man who uniquely and exclusively stands in between God and man as a substitute and resurrected Lord?
- iii. 1 Peter 3:18
 1. I want you to consider Christ's SUFFERING – physical, guilt, wrath.
 2. I want you to consider Christ's SUBSTITUTION.
 - i. For sins – SUBSTITUTION
 1. The righteous for the unrighteous
 3. I want you to consider Christ's SUFFICIENCY
 - a. ONCE
 4. I want you to consider Christ's SUCCESS
 - a. THAT He might bring us to God - SUCCESS
- iv. Matthew 27
 1. Consider Christ's Sufferings.
 2. Consider Christ's Silence/Submission.
 3. Consider Christ's Sovereignty.
 4. Consider Christ's Substitution .
 5. Consider Christ's Sufficiency.



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f. Response

- i. Anyabwile: Through the perfect obedience of the Son of God and his willing death on the cross as payment for our sins, all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, following him as Savior and Lord, will be saved from the wrath of God to come, be declared just in his sight, have eternal life, and receive the Spirit of God as a foretaste of glories of heaven with God himself.
- ii. Dever: Have I clearly stated that a person must respond to the Gospel and must believe this message and so turn from his life of self-centeredness and sin?

VI. GOD IS THE HIGHEST AND MOST FINAL GOOD OF THE GOSPEL

- a. Why is it good news to you that your sins are forgiven? Why is it good news to you that you stand righteous in the courtroom of the Judge of the universe?
- b. What's wrong with many of our answers is that they do not treat God as our final and highest good of the Gospel. They do not express a supreme desire to be with God. God often is not even mentioned but just His gifts.
- c. Why has God given his gifts? They have come for one great reason: that we might behold forever the glory of God in Christ, and by beholding become the kind of people who delight in God above all things, and by delighting display his supreme beauty and worth with ever-increasing brightness and bliss forever.
- d. Piper: All the saving events and all the saving blessings of the Gospel are the means of getting obstacles out of the way so that we might know and enjoy God most fully.
 - i. Propitiation, redemption, forgiveness, imputation, sanctification, liberation, healing, heaven – none of these is good news except for one reason: they bring us to God for our everlasting enjoyment of him.
 - ii. The Gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it's a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God.
 - iii. The highest goal or chief end of the Gospel is seeing and savoring God himself, being changed into the image of his Son so that more and more we delight in and display God's infinite beauty and worth.
 - iv. Psalm 70:4 "May those who love your salvation say evermore, 'God is great!'"
 - v. Psalm 16:5 "The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup."
 - vi. Psalm 42:1 "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."
 - vii. 2 Corinthians 5:8 "We would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord."
 - viii. Philippians 1:23 "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better"



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- ix. Isaiah 40:9 “Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”
 - x. 1 Peter 3:18 “For Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.”
- e. Now wait a minute doesn't all this stuff –take the main focus off of us?
- i. From *God is the Gospel*:
 1. Do you feel more loved because God makes much of you, or because, at the cost of his Son, he enables you to enjoy making much of him forever?
 2. Does your happiness hang on seeing the cross of Christ as a witness to your worth, or as a way to enjoy God's worth forever?
 3. Is God's glory in Christ the foundation of your gladness?
 4. Man-centered view of love – being loved = being made much of – if you don't make much of me then you are not loving me.
 5. What happens when you apply this definition of love to God? It weakens his worth, undermines his goodness, and steals our final satisfaction.
 6. If the enjoyment of God himself is not the final and best gift of love, then God is not the greatest treasure, his self-giving is not the highest mercy, the Gospel is not the good news that sinners may enjoy their maker, Christ did not suffer to bring us to God, and our souls must look beyond him for satisfaction.
 7. The distortion of divine love and self-admiration can be subtle.
 8. We claim to be praising God because of his love for us, but if his love for us has as its root his making much of us, who is really being praised?
 9. We are willing to be God-centered, it seems, as long as God is man-centered. We are willing to boast in the cross as long as the cross is a witness to our worth. Who then is our pride and joy?
 10. When you stand at the Grand Canyon or the Alps – does it increase your self-esteem?
 11. Soul-health and great happiness come not from beholding a great self but a great splendor.
- f. Gospel Gifts can never replace the God of the Gospel
- i. Dever: Sometimes, it's tempting to present some of the very real benefits of the Gospel as the Gospel itself. And these benefits tend to be things that non-Christians naturally want, like joy, peace, happiness, fulfillment, self-esteem, or love. Yet presenting them as the Gospel is presenting a partial truth.
 - ii. Packer: A half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth.



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- iii. God is the Gospel = the highest, best, final, decisive good of the Gospel, without which no other gifts would be good, is the glory of God in the face of Christ revealed for our everlasting enjoyment.
- iv. If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there? People who would be happy in Heaven even if Christ were not there, will not be in Heaven.
- v. Piper: If we believe (propitiation, redemption, forgiveness, imputation, sanctification, liberation, healing, etc.) have happened to us, but do not embrace them for the sake of getting to God, they have not happened to us. Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the Gospel.
- vi. Are we as teachers/preachers/ambassadors – really preparing people for Heaven? Christ is the supreme pleasure and not the gifts.
 - 1. Nothing fits a person to be more useful on earth than to be more ready for heaven.
 - 2. Nothing would bless this world more than more people who are more like Christ.

VII. A HEALTHY CHURCH MEMBER IS GOSPEL SATURATED (Anyabwile)

- a. Know the Gospel
 - i. Many professing and believing Christians possess a shallow understanding of the Gospel as a result of years of hearing short “Gospel presentations” tacked onto the ends of sermons.
- b. Desire to hear the Gospel and preach the Gospel to yourself.
 - i. We must cultivate and protect a ravenous desire for the Gospel. Regularly hearing and plumbing the depths of the Gospel increases:
 - 1. our knowledge of the message,
 - 2. our affection for the Savior
 - 3. our skill in sharing the message
 - ii. Listen actively for the Gospel and Gospel implications in sermons.
 - 1. Listen to it afresh. Reaffirm your belief in its truth, promises, and power in your life. Appropriate it for any sins that you become conscious of through the sermon or self-examination.
 - iii. Listen so actively and longingly for this news that you feel your poverty and malnourishment when it's missing in a sermon.



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- iv. Mahaney – *Living the Cross Centered Life* – Memorize the Gospel, pray the Gospel, sing the Gospel, review how the Gospel has changed us, and study the Gospel.

- c. Take the Gospel to its conclusion.
 - i. Piper: Until the Gospel events of Good Friday and Easter and the Gospel promises of justification and eternal life lead you to behold and embrace God himself as your highest joy, you have not embraced the Gospel of God. You have embraced some of his gifts. You have rejoiced over some of his rewards. You have marveled at some of his miracles. But you have not yet been awakened to why the gifts, the rewards, and the miracles have come. They have come for one great reason: that you might behold forever the glory of God in Christ, and by beholding become the kind of person who delights in God above all things, and by delighting display his supreme beauty and worth with ever-increasing brightness and bliss forever.

- d. Order your life around the Gospel.
 - i. The Gospel should animate every area of our lives.
 - ii. We want the Gospel central to our communication with others, central to how we encourage and correct, central to individual career and relationship decisions, central to the decisions the church makes corporately, and central to all our habits of life.
 1. Intentionally frequent the same stores with the aim of building relationships and familiarity with store personnel, and hopefully having Gospel conversations.
 2. Use vacation for short-term mission trips.
 3. Volunteer in community organizations to influence for the Gospel.
 4. Host home discussions regarding religion and philosophy.
 5. Invite neighbors over for dinner or for holiday parties and talking with them about Christ.
 6. Host Bible studies in the work place.
 7. Join neighborhood clubs to build relationships and further Gospel opportunities.
 8. Invite friends to church and special religious events where the Gospel is sure to be center stage.

- e. Share the Gospel with others
 - i. Sharing the Gospel is more than just sharing our testimony or living a good life.
 - ii. With urgency and love we must tell the non-Christians among us to repent of their sins and to believe on Jesus Christ.



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f. Guard the Gospel

- i. A healthy church member takes seriously the responsibility of guarding the Gospel from corruption and abandonment.
- ii. Galatians 1:8-9; 2 John 10-11; 2 Peter 2:2; Jude 3
- iii. The healthy church and church member fight for and protect the apostolic Gospel delivered and preserved in the pages of Scripture. When we don't accept that responsibility and are not vigilant in understanding and applying the Gospel, we leave it to be corrupted, abused, and abandoned by unscrupulous teachers and the forces of the evil one.

VIII. SHARING THE GOSPEL

- a. Dever: When a church is healthy, and its members know and cherish the Gospel above everything else, they will increasingly want to share it with the world.
- b. Truett: The supreme indictment that you can bring against a church . . . is that such a church lacks in passion and compassion for human souls. A church is nothing better than an ethical club if its sympathies for lost souls do not overflow, and if it does not go out to seek to point lost souls to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- c. Dever: Today, the members of our churches will spend far more time with non-Christians in their homes, offices, and neighborhoods for far longer than they will spend with other Christians – let alone non-Christians – on Sundays. Evangelism is not something we mainly do by inviting someone to church. Each of us has tremendous news of salvation in Christ. Let's not barter it for something else. Let's share it today!
- d. Dever "What we should really fear, as a nation but primarily as individuals are the consequences of ignoring the Gospel. For the day will come for each one of us when our time for responding is over, when our time of evaluating the claims of God is done, when His time of evaluating us finally comes."



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IX. RESOURCES ON THE GOSPEL:

- a. *What is the Gospel?* – Gilbert
- b. *Prodigal God* - Tim Keller
- c. *Gospel* – Greear
- d. *Explicit Gospel* – Chandler
- e. *The Gospel for Real Life* – Bridges
- f. *A Gospel Primer* – Milton Vincent
- g. *How the Gospel Brings us All the Way Home* – Thomas
- h. *All of Grace* – Spurgeon
- i. *Getting the Gospel Right* – R. C. Sproul