



The Lost Foundations - The Fullness of the Gospel

Introduction

But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

Romans 15:29

Imagine someone shows up at your door, with a message in their hand. You can tell they have a message because you are watching them from an upstairs window. Considering the look on their face, you suspect they have some good news to share. It also helps that the package they've brought with them has "GOOD NEWS" stamped right on the top.

Trouble is: You are very busy. Things to do, people to see, etc. Perhaps the news isn't worth your time anyway; perhaps it's just a scam. You could ignore them until they go away.

So, what do you do? Do you step out onto the porch, give them five minutes and encourage them to get to the point? Or, do you invite them in, ask them to sit down and offer them some tea?

It would help to know the nature of the good news; right? But how will you know, if you don't take the time?

What if you knew the good news was from the king; and it was news that dramatically affected your life? How much time and consideration would you give for that good news? Would you, perhaps, invite the messenger to stay for dinner?

I believe you would.

So let me ask you: What is the "good news" of the Bible to you? What is the gospel? Is it "Jesus died for me, so I could go to heaven"? If so, what have you made of His burial and resurrection?

Jesus ascended, to sit at the Father's right hand; and to send the Holy Spirit. Does your gospel include His ascension? What about Pentecost? At least one denomination takes its name from this conviction: Full Gospel Fellowship.

Have I got you thinking more about that good news yet?

Those more versed in Scripture may describe the gospel with words like rebirth, reconciliation and redemption. Certainly these help in our understanding; as do justification, sanctification and glorification.

Perhaps these are meat, for a milk-fed church. Who really understands them as the gospel?

Most consider the gospel to be a product of the New Testament. But, did you know that the gospel was preached almost two thousand years before Jesus was born?

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." Galatians 3:8

The gospel has been a part of God's story at least as far back as His covenant with Abraham.

More recently, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). Is the gospel everything He preached? What about the Sermon on the Mount; or all of His parables?

Perhaps the most important question of all: What does "the kingdom of God" have to do with the gospel? When was the last time you heard someone preach on the gospel of the kingdom of God – the good news that Jesus came to preach (Mark 1:14-15)?

Have you ever noticed Paul's passionate defense of the gospel in his letter to the Galatians? Here's a taste of it.

Even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:8

This begs the question: What is this gospel that Paul was so passionate about? Shouldn't we have a good idea – particularly those of us called to defend it (i.e., every Christian)?

Perhaps you are thinking that there is much good news in the Bible, but it is not all "The Gospel". This makes sense, but who would define the boundaries of it? We have so many perspectives and opinions. Does this not invite sectarianism and division?

Is the gospel such a small thing that any person or denomination can fully understand or explain it?

It seems to me that while boundaries are not necessarily wrong, they may have become unprofitable – even harmful – to the followers of Jesus Christ.

I believe the Lord's objective in this lesson is to do something more than establish new boundaries for "The Gospel". I am convinced that He wants to remove the boundaries of doctrine and dogma – at least for a safe moment – to bless us with more understanding and belief; that the blessing of the gospel would be more fully ours.

Therefore, let me suggest a different approach; an approach that removes our potentially limited perspectives. Rather than attempt to narrow down the gospel into a ten minute sound bite – and risk missing some part of its fullness – let us begin with the broadest of perspectives.

Let us begin by looking at the gospel from the perspective of the One who wrote the story.

The Gospel According to the Father

As we have previously established, God is the central figure of His story. His purposes are paramount. The gospel is His invention; therefore, it must certainly be for His purposes.

In America, we have grown up with the philosophies of a democratic republic. It has been a great political experiment. Regrettably, it has created a cultural mindset that makes it difficult to see things from God's perspective.

In God's kingdom, there is no "of the people, by the people, for the people". The King has the only and final vote. He is the one that determines and executes mercy and justice. Our rights are what He determines them to be.

For the rebellious, this is an unacceptable situation. And that is exactly what got us into this mess. The first sin was not disobedience, it was outright rebellion.

Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they decided that they should determine what was best for themselves. They decided that they would become the captains of their own ship. They mutinied, and all was lost (for a time).

To remedy this situation, God sent Jesus Christ to the earth. Why would He do such a thing? Why would He subject His Son to the humiliation, persecution and pain? What was His primary mission?

Most in the Western church have been taught to believe that He was sent to save mankind from hell. We call it "the good news of our salvation". We live like it is about us.

Don't get me wrong. Our salvation is certainly good news. However, it is not the full gospel; certainly not from the Father's perspective.

Our participation in God's story does not begin with our salvation. It begins with the opposite of what got us into this predicament. It begins with our surrender to the purposes of God; and restoring them... for Him.

The Gospel of Intimacy

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ...I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:3,23

The intimacy that God had with Adam and Eve was a shadow of His ultimate intention. Indeed, the gospel brings with it the reality of God as our Heavenly Father; and a unity with Him that is beyond our imagination. Stop and consider this from His perspective.

As a father (or mother), what would be your experience in losing the intimate relationship you have with your children; that they would be as dead to you? Go ahead, allow yourself to empathize with the Father; and experience His heart for the gospel.

Now, consider what it must mean to our Father in heaven to regain the intimacy that His children threw away. Jesus left us with a parable; that we might come to understand the desire of the Father's heart.

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. Luke 15:20

Have we not lost something in this matter of the gospel? Is it not the greatest news, that our Father is now able to enjoy the gathering together of His children to Himself?

We must make this more of our gospel; that He might fully enjoy His habitation with us.

The Gospel of His Habitation

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. John 14:23

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." Revelation 21:3

The kingdom of God has come and is coming. Spiritually, He has made His home in us. The physical manifestation of that good news – from God's perspective – is His dwelling with His people forever and ever. Notice that mankind is not the subject of these passages. It is about His home and His tabernacle.

Intimacy and habitation – for the Father – is the good news from God's perspective. When we see it from His perspective, it becomes even better news for us.

However (and this is very important), this good news is not possible without the restoration of God's kingdom.

When mankind rebelled, God was rejected as Lord and King. He lost His position on the throne of their heart. Consequently, the preamble, cornerstone and core of the gospel – the good news that the Father sent His Son to preach – is the restoration of His kingdom.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:14-15

At the beginning of His ministry, in the building His church, Jesus laid the gospel foundation. That foundation is the kingdom of God. Let me say that again. The foundation of the gospel is the reign of God, through His Son.

Kingdom (*basileia*): royal power, kingship, dominion, rule (not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom); of the royal power of Jesus as the triumphant Messiah; of the royal power and dignity conferred on Christians in the Messiah's kingdom; [secondarily] a kingdom, the territory subject to the rule of a king; used in the N.T. to refer to the reign of the Messiah. *Outline of Biblical Usage, BlueLetterBible.org*

Notice that the primary meaning of *basileia* is the power and right to rule over a kingdom. The gospel is the gospel of His reign. It is only secondarily the place or people of that kingdom. Again we are reminded that the story is first and foremost about Him.

In secular Greek, *euaggelion* (gospel) described the pronouncement of victory, delivered by a messenger from the battlefield, to the capital and its inhabitants. Its meaning also included the reward given to the messenger for that good news (from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, by Kittel and Friedrich).

Do you see it? Jesus came to pronounce the victory of God's kingdom; and to receive His reward in that pronouncement. The reward of the gospel is first and foremost His!

Indeed, the Father sent Jesus with a purpose: To preach the gospel of the kingdom everywhere He went. It was good news for everyone. He had His disciples do the same – even before He spoke to them about His death.

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 10:5-7

The followers of Jesus continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom even after Jesus ascended to sit at His Father's right hand.

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Acts 8:12

So, why are so few preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God today? When did the good news become too difficult to share?

Sadly, we are hiding the greatest blessing of the gospel from those who are seeking to follow the King of kings.

When Jesus preached, "Repent", He meant that we were to turn from self-rule to the kingdom rule of His Father. This transfer of power – from rebellion to surrender – produces a holy relationship between the Father and His children.

Furthermore, the gospel of the kingdom is the good news of the reign of a good King.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."* Luke 4:18-19

The fullness of the gospel is founded upon the purposes of God. There is no good news – nor a good King – without the restoration of His reign, intimacy and habitation.

Lastly, a gospel that is by Him, through Him and for Him is a gospel to which men can truly surrender; even unto death. And isn't that the point – that we would give up our lives for His sake and the gospel; thereby finding the life that He alone offers (Mark 8:35).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel most Christians think about; for it is the gospel of our salvation. However, for many, this gospel – the power of God to salvation – has been reduced to a decision and a prayer; made in a moment. Much has been lost to our event-driven church culture.

To understand the fullness of the gospel from Jesus' perspective, we must first understand the nature of salvation – that it is a process.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1Corinthians 1:18

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2Corinthians 2:15

Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Romans 5:9-11

But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13

As followers of Jesus Christ, we “have been saved”, we “are being saved” and we “shall be saved”. The implications of this are profound. For example, how do you answer the question: When were you saved?

You may be feeling a bit rattled right now. You may be experiencing a growing sense of concern about where this is going. Take a deep breath. All we are trying to do here is explore the full blessing of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You don't have to believe anything I am suggesting here; and you don't have to change the way you are living. That is between you and the Master. So, let down your doctrinal guard a little bit. Open your ears to hear what the Spirit of the Lord may be saying to the church.

When we recognize that salvation is a process, it unbinds the gospel from any one particular event. It does not reduce the importance of that event. It simply allows for broader and deeper understanding; helping us discover the full blessing and wonder of the gospel.

For example – and this is where we are heading – the process of our salvation is directly tied to the major events in Jesus' life. From birth to ascension, and all the way to His marriage, our salvation is a spiritual reality of the physical manifestations of His life.

It is important to note that this is not new revelation – new mystery, discovered in our day. This connection has been taught and celebrated in the church for millennia; and recent enough that many would recognize the names of its preachers and teachers (e.g., Murray, Tozer, Redpath, Katz, Nee, and Austin-Sparks).

Furthermore, as we consider the gospel from Jesus' perspective, we must keep two very important things in mind. First, the grace of God that has been offered to us by the events of Jesus' life are appropriated through faith in God's effectual working in them and us (Ephesians 2:8; Colossians 2:12).

Second, it will be most profitable to remember that Jesus and our Father in Heaven are the primary benefactors of their grace.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-14

Yes, Jesus gave Himself for us! This is our wonderful hope. But, let's be careful to recognize that our redemption is secondary to His higher purpose: That He might have for Himself His own special people.

For this He was born; to die, be buried and to rise again. This we know very well. But, have you considered the fullness of the story?

Jesus ascended into heaven. From there, He sent the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher, Helper and Comforter. He will one day marry the one who has made herself ready.

In the meantime, He lives that we might have His life. With that in mind, let's take a deeper look at some of the more significant events of His life; beginning in the most reasonable place.

The Gospel of His Birth

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29

Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 1John 3:9

Many times the simplest things are the things we overlook; and sometimes they are some of the most awesome things we will discover. As the firstborn of many brethren, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His mother, Mary, was impregnated with the seed (Greek, *sperma*) of God.

We call our God, "Father", because we have also been born of His seed. At our glorification, we shall be joint heirs with Christ; ruling with Him as His bride (more on that later). This is incredibly good news.

Furthermore, having been born of God, we are truly capable of not sinning. In fact, the passage says we cannot sin. Rather than explain this away, perhaps we should apply the faith we have been given to appropriate the blessing of this good news.

How is this possible – this not sinning? The answer awaits us.

The Gospel of His Death

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2Corinthians 5:21

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

The good news of Jesus' death is – just in itself – enough to prompt and motivate our never-ending praise. Without His brutal death on the cross, we would not be reconciled to God. There is no way to overestimate the importance of Jesus Christ's substitutionary atonement AND our being put to death with Him (Galatians 2:20).

Tragically, for many, the gospel of Jesus' death has become the fullness of the gospel. They have been led to believe that God's sacrifice of His Son saves them; that this is all the grace of God that they must believe.

The gospel of His death – as much good news as it is – will not save anyone. Yes, the death of the Holy Lamb of God is necessary for our salvation, but it is only “that we might become”. Take notice, for there is much more.

The Gospel of His Resurrected Life

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Romans 5:9-10

There is no question that Christ's death was required and effectual. His death justified and reconciled us to God (and was prerequisite for our salvation). But, “having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”.

Furthermore, there is “much more” to the effectualness of His life. Let me say it a different way:

**As much as our Savior's death accomplished,
His life shall accomplish much more!**

One of the greatest deceptions in the Western church is that a Christian can live out of Christ's death. We have allowed ourselves to settle for a ticket to heaven, bought by His death. The tragic and sobering truth is that His death will not get us there. Nothing less than His life will save us.

So, how do we appropriate His saving life? We appropriate it in the same way we appropriated the grace of His death (i.e., our reconciliation).

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:8-9

Are you willing to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord? Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? Then you will be saved. It is the promise of God.

Here is an important question that you may not have been asked: Do you believe that you were raised with Him? It may be that, like me, you were taught (or left to assume) that the resurrection of the dead is an event reserved for the future. This is understandable, for such a thing is true.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1Peter 1:3-5

However, there is – once again – much more. The physical resurrection of the sons of God is a spiritual reality – right now – for those that have faith in that work (of God).

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Philippians 3:8-11

Most Christians have been taught that to “gain Christ and be found in Him”, and to “know Him” are experiences of this life. So, why haven’t we been taught and encouraged to “know... the power of His resurrection”? Is it any less important?

Paul’s passionate confession to the Church at Philippi is a pressing on to attain the resurrection from the dead – on this side of heaven. This passage clearly describes an ongoing activity – a process of laying hold of the very power of God. Paul prayed the same for the Ephesians (and for us):

... that you may know... what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead... Ephesians 1:18-20

This knowing (Greek, *ginosko*) is an intimate experience of the thing to be known. It is a grace of God appropriated by our faith in His working. Stop for a moment and consider the fullness of the blessing God intended in our resurrection with Jesus Christ.

The resurrection from the dead is a process that begins when we are born again, in Christ Jesus. It finds its end in our physical resurrection, at the end of the age – when we will be like Him (1John 3:2). In the meantime, by grace through faith, we are laying hold of His resurrected life.

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
Galatians 2:20*

The Gospel and Baptism

Of course, it should be enough that Jesus commanded us to baptize. It was at His own baptism – where the Spirit descended upon Him; and His Father blessed Him – that He said, “... for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Is it possible that baptism is as important for us as it was for Jesus?

As this (i.e., baptism) is a particularly sensitive and divisive topic in the church, let me begin by reminding you that salvation is a process. Furthermore, God has a purpose in everything that He commands. Therefore, every step in the process of salvation is effectual – for our salvation. Notice that I am being careful NOT to say that baptism saves us.

It seems to me that the following passages speak for themselves. However, you may not agree that they mean what I think they mean (and I am okay with that). My challenge to you: Consider them in light of the gospel’s fullness – death, burial and resurrection; and Jesus’ simple command that all be baptized.

So, let me ask you: What, if anything, does God accomplish in our baptism? Is it a work of man (i.e., our first act of obedience), or is it a sacrament of God?

The Bible has more to say about this subject than most have considered. Here are a few passages to whet your appetite; that you would be encouraged to search further into this incredible mystery:

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38

For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Acts 22:15-16

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into

death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:1-4

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Galatians 3:26-27

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. Colossians 2:11-12

Who can read these passages – with an open mind and heart – and not understand and believe that baptism is more than symbolic? Is it not effectual in the process of salvation?

Let me direct your attention to the Colossians passage, where we see that baptism (our participation in His burial) is the connector – so to speak – between the Lord’s death and His resurrection. Can one get to resurrection without baptism?

Also notice that it is “through faith in the working of God”. What faith is that, if not our faith in God’s work through baptism? The effectualness of baptism requires a faith in it.

Lastly, let me encourage you in this: Most whom object to this line of thought, do so because they see baptism as a work of man (i.e., our first act of obedience). This objection is neutralized in the understanding that baptism is God’s work. Why would it be anything else?

... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

The Gospel of Christ’s Ascension

... and [God] raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6-7

We are not only made to be partakers of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, but of His ascension, as well. Notice that “raised” is accurately translated in the past tense (for the believer). This is perhaps the most challenging mystery of our participation in Christ’s life; and likely the most powerful.

As you read this excerpt from F.J. Huegel’s *Bone of His Bone*, keep in mind that we are exploring the current spiritual reality of the future physical manifestation of our life with Christ, as His Bride.

As Paul puts it, we were "made to sit together in the Heavenlies with Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). Jesus states the case in His High Priestly prayer, which had as its supreme object this very union of which we are speaking, in this wise: "I in them and Thou in Me . . . Father I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory." That He had in mind His going to the Father is evident enough, for He had already said: "And now I am no longer in the world. And now I come to Thee." By faith He was already taking His place at the right hand of the Father. He was returning by the way of the Cross, the empty tomb, and ascension to the Throne He had left, and by faith He was taking with Him those who in the foreknowledge of God were to form His mystic body. The Heavenly Bridegroom was placing the Bride at His side on the Throne.

At this point, I come to the end of my abilities to explain what I know to be true: Believers have, on this side of heaven, access to the very power of God; seated with Him on the throne, to co-reign with Christ in the spirit realm.

Our ascension with Christ is a mystery that Christ and the Holy Spirit must reveal to each of us. Pray for such revelation. It is your birthright.

The Gospel of the Holy Spirit's Empowerment

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." Luke 3:21-22

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high. Luke 24:49

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven... Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4

Jesus was endued with power for ministry when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Having ascended to sit with His Father, He sent the same Holy Spirit to endue them with the same power – for the same ministry.

We will discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the building of the church – and the preparation of the Bride of Christ in a later chapter. For now, it is enough to recognize that this is a significant event in Jesus' life – and the life of His followers.

The Gospel of Christ's Return, Reign, Wedding and Beyond

The last four chapters of God's story contain the grand finale of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They contain at least three key events in His life. Each one has spiritual significance to His followers – the culmination of the mission He was sent to accomplish: The restoration of all God lost in mankind's rebellion.

This is the mission Jesus has given to His followers. Our obedient participation in His Great Commission will hasten the day of His return (2 Peter 3:11-13). This age will end; and the first of many others will begin.

As you read the following excerpts, allow the word of God to quicken and increase the desires He has placed in your heart for their fulfillment. He has promised to give you those desires (Psalm 37:4). From there, you will learn His will in it – for you and your fellowship.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelation 19:11-16

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 19:6-7; 21:2

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:1-2

Jesus Christ will return to this Earth and reign for 1000 years. Think about that for a moment. He will come to reign on this Earth – right here!! And he who has a part in the first resurrection will reign with Him, without Satan to interfere. This is the destiny of those who have been resurrected with Him.

Then, the bride that He has suffered long for, will come out of heaven from His Father, to co-reign with Him forever and ever. Get this: The story doesn't actually end. There are new nations – ruled and healed – from the throne of God and of the Lamb (with His wife by His side).

This is incredibly good news – the physical manifestation of our current spiritual reality. Therefore, we must not waste a single moment of our preparation in this age. We must lay hold of the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is His life; and it must be lived.

The blessing of this good news is so majestic and awesome, we could be satisfied that all has been discovered. But, we dare not come up short! There is much more to understand, believe and enjoy. Let us press on to more fullness.

The Foundation of the Prophets and Apostles

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Recognizing that we are on a mission to rediscover the lost foundations of our faith; and seeing here that those foundations include the proclamations of the prophets and the teachings of the apostles; it would do us well to consider what they had to say about the gospel.

As we begin, it is interesting – if not important – to recognize that Jesus is at the center of it all. He is the fulfillment of the prophecies, and He is the subject (and objective) of the Apostles' teachings.

The Prophets' Gospel

Even before Adam and Eve rebelled against God, God had a plan for getting back what He was to lose. He spoke of it often in the Old Testament, beginning with His own prophetic word.

*And I (God) will put enmity
Between you (the serpent) and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed (Jesus);
He (Jesus) shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel. Genesis 3:15*

Notice that this is God's declaration of war against our greatest enemy; some very good news.

Through His relationship with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc., God demonstrated the relationship He desired to have with His people – a relationship of peace, joy and power. Then the time came for Him to speak more directly with all of His people, through the great and lesser Prophets.

What follows is a small collection of gospel prophecy.

*For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,*

*To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9:6-7*

This passage is most known through its use during the Christmas season. Perhaps we have missed the power of it as a gospel pronouncement – the pronouncement of God’s kingdom and His soon-coming King. Notice also that the LORD has committed to perform this Himself.

Read Isaiah 9:6-7 with this (perhaps new) gospel consideration in mind. What does it say to you about the good news of the kingdom of God? Here’s another pronouncement – one that will help – repeated by Jesus at the start of His ministry:

*The Spirit of the LORD God is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord... Isaiah 61:1-2*

Is this not the gospel – God’s very intention in sending His Son? Did He not say so, Himself (Luke 4:21)?

Many other Old Testament prophecies have been repeated in the New (e.g., Isaiah 53, Jeremiah 31, and Joel 2). They are as much “New” as they are “Old”; which reminds me of something interesting that I once heard:

It is entirely possible to preach the gospel from the Old Testament Scriptures. After all, Jesus did it – in Luke 24:27!

As a side note, allow me to add the following observation: One of the more important aspects of the Prophets’ gospel is the proof it gives for the continuity of God’s story. The Bible is not a collection of tried and failed plans by God to save mankind. It is the story of a loving and persistent God who – with foreknowledge – architected, orchestrated and executed a master plan, to prepare a people worthy of His holiness and glory.

There is much more to the Prophets’ gospel than we have space for in this lesson. My hope is that you will be encouraged to consider the fullness of the gospel that is found in their perspectives; and that you will continue to search them out. After all, shouldn’t we long to know and understand – as they did – the end of what they were proclaiming?

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. 1Peter 1:10-12

Let me close here with a final passage – one that gives us greater insight into the purpose of the gospel.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Ezekiel 36:26-27

Did you know that part of God’s work in your redemption was to give you a brand new heart? You no longer have a heart that is deceitfully wicked. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Don’t refuse the good news; brought to you by the prophets.

The Apostles’ Gospel

As with the Prophets, the Apostles had more to say than we can include here. In fact, the following passages could be chapters unto themselves. As with the prophecies, they are offered here (along with those previously referenced) to encourage your searching – for the fullness of the gospel; and for the inspection of your foundation.

Like the Prophets, the Apostles had much to say about the gospel. In the NKJV, “gospel” occurs one hundred times in ninety-four verses; and in nineteen of the New Testament’s twenty-seven books. From Matthew to Revelation, the gospel is given for our edification and encouragement.

Of course, the Apostles’ perspectives come to us from a different vantage point (than the Prophets). What the Prophets longed to see, the Apostles saw unfold right before their eyes. They experienced the passion of the Father’s heart; and His Son’s passion at the cross. They saw the prophecies come to life. They were disciplined into the life of the New Covenant’s good news.

Having been disciplined, the Apostle’s received the Lord’s commission: Go and make disciples... teaching them to observe all that He, their Master, commanded them. As we consider the following apostolic teachings, remember that we, too, are called to the Great Commission.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 1Corinthians 15:3-5

Of all the many profound truths that Paul wrote about the gospel, the “first of all” truth was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We were reconciled by His death, that by His life, we shall be saved (Romans 5:8-10). Furthermore, and still more amazing, we are seated with Him at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 2:6).

In His second epistle, Peter challenges the boundaries of understanding and belief, to encourage us in the grace and peace of God and of Jesus our Lord:

... as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2Peter 1:3-4

These divine truths of the gospel are not reserved for the sweet-by-and-by, but precious promises for life on this side of heaven. The fullness of the gospel is the abundant life that Jesus promises to give (John 10:10).

This brings us to an important consideration – a foundation that has been lost by many; lost to easy believism and its limited gospel. Make no mistake about it; this foundational truth was gospel truth to the Apostles.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

The purpose of our salvation is good works – that we should walk in them. Not salvation by works, but works by grace, through faith. These works bring our faith to life (James 2:14-26); and glory to our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Truly, we have been created, saved and called to participate in the continuance of the gospel. We are to work out our salvation; for God is working in us to will and do to His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). The gospel is to be a cooperative endeavor, evidenced in our life; both internally and toward others.

After encouraging us in God’s divine power and promises, Peter presses on in persuading us to diligently lay hold of them.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2Peter 1:5-11

Our fruitfulness, and our entrance into the kingdom, is dependent on our diligence (i.e., haste and earnestness). Where does this diligence come from? Certainly not from ourselves.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God... 2Corinthians 3:5

As with all work in the kingdom of God, it is by God's grace, through our faith, that we are made sufficient as ministers of the new covenant (v. 6). Even our diligence comes from God; through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We dare not leave this subject without a word from the apostle John; who, interestingly, did not use the word "gospel" to express the fullness of a good news life. Perhaps, to John, it was all "good news".

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. 1John 3:16-19

As I read this passage again – for at least the hundredth time – I realize that it encourages and challenges me, more than any other, to a life that enjoys the fullness of the blessing of the gospel. That fullness can only be realized through our understanding, belief and living in the fullness of God's good news.

Conclusion

Given the above-ness of God's thoughts and ways, it would be naïve to think that we have covered its fullness in this chapter. Frankly, there are portions of the gospel that I simply do not understand (yet!).

That said, I understand and believe more now than I did at the beginning of this search (Proverbs 25:2). I hope you feel the same; and will commit with me to begin living out of the fullness of the gospel that you know. I suspect we will discover a good deal more good news in subsequent chapters.

In the meantime, it is of great importance that we embrace the fullness of the gospel as something more than theology and doctrine. It is nothing less than the work of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It has been said that the gospel is a Person – the Lord Jesus Christ. In both perspectives (which do not contradict each other), an application and an appropriation are necessary.

By grace, the fullness of the gospel is applied – for the purposes of God. By faith, the fullness is appropriated – again, for God's purposes. We are secondary beneficiaries.

Grace and faith are not stagnant, limited commodities. We do not have the fullness of either. Given our current state, this is good news – knowing that there is more on offer. We must continue to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of us.

A corporate commitment to the full gospel of Jesus Christ would solve most of the problems facing the Western church. When leaders give up their reign for His, many will follow – thus creating a mass movement

from the enemies' camp, into the kingdom. We have been given influence for such a movement. It is time to get moving.

Working It Out

1. Review your notes and the Scripture passages from this week's module. Share the ones that are most meaningful to you, with someone else. The truth will make them free.
2. Each day this week, ask the Lord to show you the areas of your life where you are reigning. Repent of this rebellion and trust Him to forgive you and lead you into the fullness of His gospel (1John 1:9).
3. Ask God to show you a portion of the gospel that He would have you make your own. Search out the matter. Reckon it to be true for you. Hear, believe and obey.

Recommended Reading

The following are some of my favorite books on this subject. Most can be found at your local Christian book store, or at one of the many online distributors.

The Normal Christian Birth; David Pawson

How God Became King: N.T. Wright