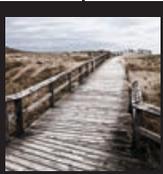


## CHAPTER 1:

# Believing the Gospel



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## Topic 1: A Radical Message

### The Uniqueness of the Gospel of Jesus

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel,  
because it is the power of God that brings  
salvation to everyone who believes: first to  
the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

—Romans 1:16

In all the history of the world there has never been anyone like Jesus. He, and his life were so extraordinary and impacted the world so strongly, that time itself changed! Our calendar is based on when he was born. We count the years since his birth and call it AD—an abbreviation for *Anno Domini*, which is Latin for “in the year of our Lord.” We refer to all history before Jesus was born as BC—an abbreviation for “before Christ.”

What was so important about Jesus? It was his radical message of love—what we call the gospel.

The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, which simply means “good news.”

Over the centuries, the gospel of Jesus has spread through the world like wildfire. Millions of people have called themselves “Christians,” naming themselves for Jesus, the Christ. They do so to show their devotion and because they want to imitate and follow him, to be Christ-like.

So what is it that inspires this type of devotion? How does this so-called “gospel of Jesus” uniquely offer hope to a world so full of trouble and bad news?

The word “gospel” comes from the Greek word *euangélion*, which simply means “good news.” For example, in ancient times, a herald might proclaim to hearers the “gospel” of a military victory, the birth of a royal child, or some other joyous announcement. In the Bible, the word “gospel” takes on added spiritual and eternal significance.

In the Old Testament, anticipating the dark years of the Babylonian exile, God moved the prophet Isaiah to encourage mourning Jews of a coming day when a God-sent messenger would “bring good news to Zion” (Isaiah 40:9). This anointed messenger, Isaiah foretold, would not only rescue the people of God (61:1–4), but also restore the perfect rule of God.

In the New Testament this good news of God is immediately associated with the person of Jesus. Luke shows Christ beginning his public ministry by reading



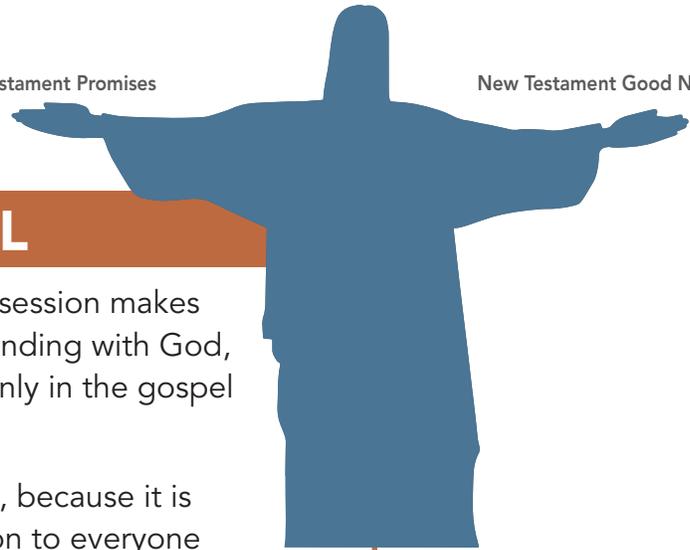
those very words of Isaiah and declaring them fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21, Isaiah 61: 1–2a). In other words, Christ was claiming to be the one about whom Isaiah prophesied. The gospel is the ancient promises of God realized in the person of Jesus Christ!

This is the reason the “evangelists,” the gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all focus on Jesus—his words

and works. This is why the apostle Paul repeatedly referred to the “gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 9:12; Galatians 1:7). *Jesus is the gospel!* He embodies God’s good news. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus made the way for us to have a relationship with God and experience his love forever.

Old Testament Promises

New Testament Good News



## G-O-S-P-E-L

Romans 1:16, the memory verse for this session makes the critical point that salvation—right standing with God, forgiveness, new/eternal life—is found only in the gospel of Jesus:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Romans 1:16).

Let’s break that good news down using the easy-to-remember acronym G-O-S-P-E-L.

The gospel is about **G**od.

The gospel is about **O**urselves.

The gospel is about a **S**avior.

The gospel is **P**owerful.

The gospel must be **E**mbraced.

The gospel is **L**ife-altering.

Next, we’ll look more closely at the first four letters, *G*, *O*, *S*, and *P*. We’ll unpack letters *E* and *L* in “Topic 2: Coming to Faith.”



## Bible Study

When we put our faith in Christ, an amazing transformation takes place. We become brand-new creations (we'll talk more about this in "Topic 3: All Things New"). This change is spiritual. It is actual and real. It is internal, fundamental, and essential. It affects our basic nature. Theologians call this regeneration. Jesus called it being "born again" (John 3).

### The gospel is about **G**od.

1. Take a few minutes to slowly read Psalm 103. What does this beloved prayer/song reveal about God's nature?
2. Psalm 103 describes God as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." Does this match what you heard about God in your younger years? Based on your experience, which of these descriptions is easiest to accept? Which is more difficult?
3. Speaking of Jesus Christ, the apostle John wrote: "No one has ever seen God. But the unique One [Jesus], who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us" (John 1:18, NLT). What does Jesus reveal to us about God?

### The gospel is about **O**urselves.

4. Read Romans 3:10–18, 23 and Romans 6:23. According to these verses, why do we need a savior?



Many people today believe we humans are basically okay—maybe even divine. But the Bible tells us that we all come into this world as naturally self-centered rebels against God. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we have inherited their sin nature, and we each have sinned in thought and deed. Every last one of us has an innate tendency as well as a long track record of wanting what we want rather than what God wants for us.

The Bible tells us the penalty for such rebellion against God is death. At the most basic level, death is separation. When we die physically, our souls are separated from our bodies, and we are separated from our loved ones. Spiritual death is the ultimate consequence of sin. It means separation from God and the life he gives.

C. S. Lewis said that we are not “basically decent” folks who need a bit of improvement. We are rebels who need to lay down our arms.

As spiritually dead people (see Ephesians 2:1), we do not have the power to “pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.”

5. What do you think total surrender looks like? Why do you think it is difficult to do?

The Bible makes it clear we are incapable of self-rescue. That’s not good news. It’s terrible news—in fact, the worst news ever . . . until we remember . . .

## The gospel is about a **S**avior.

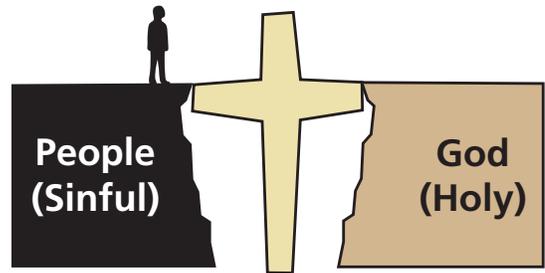
God has not left us alone in our helpless, hopeless state (remember his love?). God sent a Savior!

6. Read Isaiah 53:1–6. This is a continuing description of the one the prophet identified as the bringer of good news. What does this passage say about Christ? What did his death accomplish? What would have happened if he hadn’t died?



The penalty for sin is death. We deserved to die. But the Bible says Jesus acted as our substitute. He voluntarily took the punishment we deserved because of our sin. "He was pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). Christ died, so that we might live.

His triumphant cry from the cross ("It is finished!" John 19:30) means that humanity's debt to God because of sin has been "paid in full." The tearing of the veil in the temple at that precise moment (Matthew 27:51) indicated that access to God was now possible for humankind because the problem of sin had been solved by Jesus.



In the cross of Christ we see vividly portrayed the awfulness of sin and the justice of God. But we also have a stunning reminder of the love of God. In the resurrection of Jesus, we have undeniable evidence of his authority and power over sin and death.

## The Gospel is **P**owerful!

7. Read our memory verse again, Romans 1:16. The Greek word translated as "power" is the word *dunamis*. This is the word from which we get our English word "dynamite." How is the gospel like "spiritual dynamite"?
  
8. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" What does it mean to be a new creation in Christ?

Knowing these truths is critical. But merely knowing them is not enough. We must take them to heart. We must exercise faith. (We'll talk more about this in "Topic 2: Coming to Faith.")



# What's in a Name?

## Ten Names of Jesus that Show How and Why He Is God's Good News

Name	Reference	Significance
<b>Immanuel</b>	Matthew 1:23	Since Jesus is "God with us" we do not have to reach up for God or go on a religious search for him; in Christ, God has come down to seek us (Luke 19:10).
<b>Jesus</b>	Matthew 1:21	"Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name <i>Yeshua</i> , which means "The Lord is salvation." Jesus came into the world not only to draw near to and seek sinners but to save them (Luke 19:10). We don't have to try to save ourselves—and we couldn't even if we tried!
<b>Lamb of God</b>	John 1:29, 36	The Old Testament provides a very strict set of rules required in order for people to be considered "right" with God. One of these rules involved the sacrifice of lambs as a sign of repentance for sins (Numbers 6:14). But Jesus, through his death and resurrection, made it possible for us to be forgiven of our sins and to know God (Matthew 27:51; Romans 5:1-2). Jesus is the perfect sacrificial lamb for all time (Hebrews 7:26-29).
<b>Gate</b>	John 10:9	Jesus is the gateway to God, the entryway to new, abundant, eternal life. Christ's disciples do not have to search for other paths or wonder if they are on the right road.
<b>Prince of Peace</b>	Isaiah 9:6	Disciples of Jesus do not have to fear that God is angry with them (or hostile toward them). Jesus came to end the conflict between God and humanity by giving himself as a peace offering. In Christ we have eternal peace with God, not based on anything we do, but based on what Christ has done for us (Romans 5:1).
<b>Light of the World</b>	John 8:12	Because Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, we do not have to stumble in darkness (John 8:2). In fact, as disciples we get to shine the light of God so that others might also see eternal truth (Matthew 5:16).
<b>Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith</b>	Hebrews 12:2	Jesus is the perfecter of faith in us, completing the work he began (Philippians 1:6). We do not have to fret or fear. The life of faith is not about trying harder but trusting more deeply. It's not about us changing ourselves but allowing Jesus to change us from the inside out.
<b>Shepherd</b>	1 Peter 2:25	In a confusing and frightening world, Jesus is the one who, as a faithful shepherd, guides us, provides for us, and protects us.
<b>Resurrection and the Life</b>	John 11:25	We do not have to fear the grave. Those who believe in Jesus will live on, even after this life. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated death for all who believe in him (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).
<b>Lord of Lords</b>	Revelation 19:16	Jesus is the sovereign, all-powerful ruler. He has promised to come again to restore the world and rule over all things forever.

Which of these names represent a way in which Jesus has impacted your life? Which name(s) represent a way in which you need Jesus? When you pray, try calling Jesus by that name.



## Take-Home Reflections

### Transformation

We began this session by talking about bad news. We then asked the question, why is the gospel of Jesus worth considering? Hopefully the answer is clear: Only the gospel reveals the heart of God to come to us, to rescue us from our brokenness, and to powerfully transform us. Only the gospel is able to meet the deepest needs of every man, woman, boy and girl in the world. Only the good news of Jesus brings the hope our souls most crave.

### What's the Difference?

Author Philip Yancey tells of a time when a group of religious scholars convened in England for a comparative religion

symposium. A lively debate over various theological concepts began and worked its way into a discussion of Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. C. S. Lewis wandered into the room, and when the topic was revealed to him, Lewis quickly put an end to the debate. "Oh, that's easy," he said. "It's grace."<sup>1</sup>

"Grace" is the beautiful biblical word that means "undeserved favor." And Lewis was right. Grace is the great distinctive of the gospel. It's grace that makes Christianity unique among the world's religions. No wonder the apostle John described Jesus as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

<sup>1</sup> Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 45.

## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse:  
"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).
2. Write about your own experience with Christ. When did he become a real person to you, more than just an idea or a historical figure?
3. Watch the news on television, or read it in the newspaper or online. Think about how the gospel of Jesus could bring hope to each crisis, crime, or tragedy.
4. Wrestle with one or two of the following:
  - ▶ How do we reconcile God's holy nature (and righteous wrath towards sin) with his love?
  - ▶ Is the cross more about the love of God or the judgment of God? Is it more about the beauty of grace or the ugliness of sin?
  - ▶ What have been the most powerful effects of the gospel in your own life?