

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

A Christian Guidebook 3



T. M. Moore

A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *What Is the Gospel?*

Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Paul did the same. The Gospel—the Good News which we are to proclaim—is about a salvation that is so great we can never experience the whole of it.

But in our day, the Gospel has been reduced and compromised, so that what many Christians today have come to believe might be described as a kind of “near Christianity” rather than the full truth.

In this section *A Christian Guidebook* we take a more Biblical look at the Gospel—what it is, what it accomplishes, and how we must proclaim it.

This *Guidebook* is designed to help us be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us by reviewing essential Christian doctrines and shoring-up the Biblical foundations of each. Our goal is to lead you into the Word of God so that you can gain a clearer and more lively understanding of what we as Christians believe.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The Gospel Is Good News of Joy!

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people."
Luke 2.10

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3.16

Good News!

Anyone who has become a Christian will tell you that the Gospel is Good News. The word "gospel" means "good news" or "good tidings." When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, when the God/Man came among us to restore human wholeness and defeat the devil, Good News of great joy was unleashed in the world.

But not like a savage beast, to tear, injure, harm, and deprive, as many people seem to think. More like a wiggly puppy, full of love, looking for a lap to plop on, a face to lick, and squeals of joy to evoke.

For the Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News of *joy!* Joy that drives away every fear. Joy that no change of circumstances can diminish. Joy that far surpasses every form of mere happiness. Joy that fills one with an indestructible sense of wellbeing, delight, pleasure, and hope. The joy we as human beings were made to know, happiness full up, overflowing, and without end.

For C. S. Lewis, this joy was the driving force of his life. He explained joy as "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction" (*Surprised by Joy*). He insisted that anyone who ever experienced joy would want to know it again and again. Yet, Lewis continued, "Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is." Because joy comes not from within, but from without.

For the joy of the Gospel is to be found in Jesus. He is our joy. He is Lord and King of all creation and Savior of those who know, love, and serve Him. He is joy, as every Christian knows, and as every Christian is eager to tell the world.

But of what does this joy consist? Why does Jesus fulfill our great need for joy?

So loved

First, because Jesus is the proof that the eternal God and Creator of all things loves us with an everlasting love. Joy is knowing—being assured and experiencing—that you are loved by God.

Not because we deserve it, for we know we do not. But because He is love and He loved us even before the world was created. God's love surrounds and sustains us in the present, and it will endure for us to all eternity. God demonstrated His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5.8). He loved us in the slime of our sin, the grime of our grossness, and the muck of our moral corruption. He sent Jesus, the God/Man, to accomplish our salvation through His life, death, resurrection, and reign. He loved us as His own children and sent the Spirit of Jesus to dwell in us. He loves us by being with us always, even to the end of the age and beyond. He will never fail us nor forsake us, so great and constant and joy-filled is His love for us.

The Gospel is the Good News that we are loved unfailingly, and Jesus is the proof of that love.

The gift of life

The Gospel also fills us with the joy of full, abundant, and eternal life in Jesus. Not just living forever. That would be boring. But life eternal, to know God and Jesus Christ with unimpeded intimacy and unparalleled

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pleasure (Jn. 17.3; Ps. 16.11). Joy is knowing and experiencing eternal life with God.

Many people today have the idea, because they are breathing, eating, working, and all the rest that goes with physical animation, that they are alive. They already have life. But unless they know Jesus and have received the joyous gift of full and abundant life which only He can give, they are merely going through the motions of life. For they have no lasting joy, no firm hope, no power to transform their self-centered ways, no sense of participation in His Body, and no ability to discern and delight in the beauty, goodness, and truth of the God of life. One must be truly alive for such privileges and joys, and only in Jesus Christ can such life be known.

The life of joy comes as a gift, bought and paid for by Jesus and bestowed by His Father and ours. No strings attached. That gift empowers one to become a Christian and to embark on the most meaningful and joyful adventure of life anyone can know.

Even in the hard times

None of this is to say that the Gospel does come to us with some trials. There will be setbacks, disappointments, failures, perhaps even harassment or persecution. There will be times of sorrow and difficulty.

All this will come because the Gospel comes to us *in time* and *as sinners*. Because of lingering sin, both in us and in the world, we cannot know the uninterrupted joy that we will know when we see Jesus face to face and are like Him (1 Jn. 3.1-3). But we can know *constant* joy, like a constant Companion, an unfailing Friend, the Strength we need in times of weakness, and the Satisfaction we can know amid dissatisfaction.

Joy unfailing. Joy illimitable. Joy to the world. The joy that is Jesus: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News of *Joy!*

Search the Scriptures

1. Meditate on John 10.10 and 14.6. What kind of “life” did Jesus give us in the Gospel? How do you experience this life?
2. Jesus said that *eternal* life was to know God and Jesus Christ (Jn. 17.3). How did Jesus use the word “know” here? How does one come to “know” God and Jesus like this? When does this eternal life begin?
3. According to John 15.9-11, how can our joy in this life “be full”?

Next steps—Conversation: When do you experience the joy of the Gospel? Share your answer with a Christian friend.

2 The Gospel Is Good News Foretold

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Luke 2.25

Long expected

A favorite Charles Wesley hymn has the following stanza:

Come, Thou long expected Jesus,
born to set Thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth Thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Wesley understood that the Gospel is about joy, the joy that every human heart ultimately longs to know. The hopes and deepest desires of every person in every nation culminate in Jesus, for He alone can set us free from our fears and sins and bring our souls true and eternal rest.

Before Jesus was born, He was expected. Devout men and women, who read and understood the Scriptures of the Old Testament, had set their desires on One Who, in His coming, would bring strength and consolation to the world.

Simeon was one such person. Luke describes him as “just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel”, for that promised One Who, Simeon knew, would bring salvation, the revelation of God’s will, and the glory of the Lord to His people (Lk. 2.29-32).

There must have been many others who were expecting the salvation and Kingdom and glory of God to appear, for Anna, the prophetess, upon seeing Jesus in the temple, “gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Lk. 2.36-38).

So there were many at the time of Jesus’ birth who believed that Good News was coming—Good News of joy and forgiveness and hope and salvation for the nations. The sudden appearance of Jesus kindled the hopes of these people who dared to hope that He might be the One “to redeem Israel” (Lk. 24.21).

Jesus was long expected because the Word of God was widely and truly known.

What did they know?

It will not be possible in a short space to provide a catalog of everything the Old Testament teaches about the coming Consolation of Israel and Savior of the world. Those in Jesus’ day who read and re-read and studied and meditated on Scripture must have cherished dozens of passages with which they no doubt encouraged one another never to give up hope. Let’s briefly consider just a few of these:

Genesis 3.15: God would send a descendant of Eve to destroy the devil and restore humankind.

Genesis 49.8-11: A King would descend from Judah like a lion to rule all God’s people and all nations.

Deuteronomy 18.15-19: A Prophet like Moses was coming with words every person must heed.

Psalms 2: God would set His own Son on the throne in Zion, and He would rule all the nations.

Psalms 110: God’s Son and David’s Lord would ascend to a heavenly throne and rule all His enemies.

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Isaiah 9.6, 7: An eternal King is coming to bring a Kingdom of peace without end.

Haggai 2.6-9: The One Who will dwell among God's people—the Desire of all Nations—is coming soon.

Zechariah 2.10-13: God is sending a King to His people Who will rule all nations.

Zechariah 6.12, 13: That coming King will build the true temple of the Lord and rule as a priest for peace.

Zechariah 9.9, 10: The King would come humbly but would rule all the world.

The problem, as you can imagine, is not in finding passages in the Old Testament that might create expectation of great joy among those who “looked for the Consolation of Israel” in Jesus’ day. Indeed, Jesus said that all Scripture is about Him (Jn. 5.39). All the Old Testament points forward—by teaching and type—to the coming of Jesus, the God/Man, and His work of making all the nations disciples.

Those who were expecting consolation and redemption, waiting devoutly for the coming of the Lord, had plenty to sustain their hopes.

More is foretold

Before Jesus was born, He was expected. Before He will complete His promised rule, He is expected again. And the joy Christians know now will not begin to compare with the joy of the Good News they will know then.

Devout disciples of Jesus still look forward to His coming among us, this time to fulfill everything the prophets and apostles have written about Him. The Gospel is Good News foretold because we know that every word written about Jesus will be accomplished; no promise will fail; nothing can prevent the perfect and complete fulfillment of Jesus’ Kingdom agenda. The joy that has been foretold will be the joy that is forever.

And the anticipation of this, to be realized when Jesus comes again, fills the Christian’s soul with joy. Israel’s Strength and Consolation, the Hope of all the earth, the dear Desire of every nation, the Joy of every longing heart is coming again! Maranatha!

And this is really Good News!

Search the Scriptures

1. Where do you turn in Scripture to encourage yourself with the promise of Jesus’ coming again?
2. According to Acts 1.1-8, what should we be concerned about until Jesus returns?
3. In Matthew 16.18, Jesus declared His agenda for the time in which we live. What is it? How does Ephesians 4.11-16 lead us to pursue this agenda?

Next steps—Preparation: How do you see Jesus, exalted in glory, at this time? Try to flesh out your vision of Jesus as He is at this time. Why does this matter (Col. 3.1-3)?

3 The Gospel Is Good News about the Kingdom

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 4.17

A new era

The focus of the Good News that Jesus proclaimed is the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of heaven (these terms are virtually interchangeable). In the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus announced something altogether new in the history of men and nations. We may identify six facets to the "newness" which comes with the Kingdom of God. The first of these is the inauguration of a *new era* in human history.

In Acts 2.14-39 Peter referred to this new era in terms of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the prophet Joel. This new era entails an opening up of revelation, as the Word and will of God become more broadly known (vv. 17, 18). The entire cosmos is affected in startling and perhaps alarming ways (vv. 19, 20), and the knowledge of salvation goes out far and wide, to be embraced by all who put their trust in the Lord (v. 21; cf. vv. 38, 39).

This new era of the Spirit, increased revelation, and the far-reaching message of salvation was foretold in the Old Testament, as we have seen. Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, has been exalted as Savior and Lord, and the new era He inaugurated has now, with the coming of the Spirit, begun to advance in earnest (cf. Dan. 2.44, 45).

A new sovereign

Second, the coming of the Kingdom of God means that a *new Sovereign* is enthroned, Whose claims and purposes must be reckoned with by all men. The people of Thessalonica immediately recognized that Paul and his associates "practiced" another King, and that His name was Jesus. They also understood that this allegiance put the Christians at odds with the dominant worldview of the day because they "opposed" the doctrine of Caesar by proclaiming Jesus as Lord and practicing loving obedience to Him.

Jesus the God/Man is Savior and Lord. King of kings and Lord of lords. Lord of all!

A new economy

In the third place, the coming of the Kingdom of God means a *new economy* has begun to unfold through the course of history. By "economy" we simply mean "administration"—a new way of doing things. Whereas prior to the coming of Christ and His Kingdom, men had only their own wisdom, wits, and strength on which to rely, now a whole new way of living in the world is opened before us, a way of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18).

In the divine economy, the Spirit of God works with the Word of God to make disciples, build the Church, and further the reign of Christ. An ethic of love and restoration serves as the platform for embodying and proclaiming the truth of God and Christ. Salvation comes to those who believe, bringing them into the community of the saints and dramatically affecting every aspect of their lives.

A new agenda

Fourth, the coming of the Kingdom of God indicates that a *new agenda* is in effect. The King has announced this new agenda as the principal means to support and advance the new economy. Central to the new agenda of the Kingdom era is the work of making disciples and building the Church, the Body of Christ (Matt. 28.18-20; 16.13-19; Eph. 4.11-16). This is a work of God's Spirit as He engages the members of the believing community in worship and in mutual acts of service and love to build unity and maturity in the congregation.

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Through such efforts individual churches grow strong as expressions of the Body of Christ. And, as churches within local communities worship and work together, they demonstrate the unity they have in Christ and realize an even richer and fuller manifestation of His Body (Jn. 17.21; Eph. 4.3).

A new priority

Because of this new era, new Sovereign, new economy, and new agenda, the Kingdom of God also brings with it *a new priority*: Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6.33). Believers seek the Kingdom of God as they exercise diligent stewardship of all the Lord's gifts; wield the power of the Spirit for loving witness; pursue holiness and the fruit and gifts of the Spirit; pray earnestly for the coming of the Kingdom; serve others in love; work to restore the reconciled world; and sow the true seed of the Kingdom in all the "as-you-are-goings" of their lives.

Kingdom-seeking is *the* defining priority for every aspect of life for those who have embraced, not the gospel of near Christianity, but the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

A new hope

Finally, the coming of the Kingdom ushers in an era of *new hope*. Paul says that being justified by faith we have entered a new place, where we stand in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5.1, 2). The glory of God is the Presence of God, experienced as a "weighty" and overwhelming engagement with inexpressible joy and true spiritual pleasure. It is this Presence of God, promised by our Lord and King, that Kingdom-dwellers earnestly seek; and, while they enter that Presence with fear, they experience it as joyous transforming power and glory.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is not, in the first instance, about you and me going to heaven when we die. It is about the *Kingdom of God*, first and foremost—about a new reality that has broken into human experience with irresistible, transforming power, making all things new and bringing the knowledge of the glory of God to light in the world.

This is the Gospel of the Kingdom. This is *Good News* indeed!

Search the Scriptures

1. What is the Kingdom of God? Why is it appropriate to say that the Kingdom of God has come, is coming, and is yet to come?
2. How should we pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6.10)? How do praying for and seeking the Kingdom go together?
3. What difference does it make if you are inviting a lost sinner to receive the Gospel of the Kingdom as opposed to the gospel of salvation?

Next steps—Preparation: How can you prepare each day for seeking the Kingdom of God?

4 The Gospel Is Good News about Salvation

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Act 2.40

And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16.30

Good News

The Philippian jailer probably considered that his life was as good as it gets. He had a secure job, which apparently included quarters for his family. He was no doubt a Roman citizen, or it's not likely he would have been trusted with keeping prisoners. Food on the table, a roof over the head, a wife and other members of the household to keep things going: Life was, well, if not good, maybe at least good enough.

Then he saw and heard something that cracked the ceiling of his worldview and let in rays of new light. In the midst of a terrifying situation where it seemed the jailer's world was coming undone—so much so that he reckoned taking his own life would be the least painless way to die (v. 27)—he heard two men call out to him from the chaos. One of them announced the surprising fact that no one had escaped the dungeon, so there was no need for the jailer to take his life.

He'd heard them in there singing before the earthquake struck, and he must have wondered about some of the words to their song. Words like "saved" or "salvation". They were singing about salvation with conviction, even, it surely sounded like, joy. Whatever "salvation" or "being saved" was, they seemed to have it.

Perhaps he was even mentioning their singing to his wife, who may have shared his curiosity about the matter. Then the earthquake struck, the jailer survived self-destruction, and he suddenly found himself at the feet of Paul and Silas asking the only thing he could think about at such a moment: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

It's amazing the way a little chaos can sharpen one's focus. "Salvation!" It captured his imagination and opened his soul to the Good News of joy and the Kingdom.

Salvation from what?

The Good News comes to one who believes in Jesus Christ (v. 30) bringing with it the gift of salvation. That salvation is, in the first instance, a salvation *from*.

Since, upon believing in Him, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and are transferred into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, we are saved from spiritual loneliness and darkness. In the world of wrong belief, where people insist on being a law unto themselves and everybody's theme song is "I am the master of my fate", people can feel disconnected from God and spiritual things. They are reduced to nothing more than another form of matter and mechanics. No soul. Nothing really like a person. Nothing but death and dust awaiting us. And thus no connection or converse with anything spiritual. This, as Paul reminds us (Rom. 1.18-32), is the death trap all inhabit who reject the knowledge of God.

When we believe in Jesus and receive His Spirit, we are delivered from spiritual loneliness because Immanuel, the God/Man, has come to dwell in us forever. Further, He has brought us into His Kingdom, His realm, and begins opening to us the truth of His Word, so that we no longer live in the confusion and uncertainty of a dark and chaotic world. We are citizens of the Kingdom of light, and every day we see things more clearly and understand ourselves and the world more in line with God's purposes and plans.

But salvation also delivers us from sin—at least, from the eternal consequences of sin and the burden of guilt

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that goes with the practice of sin. Jesus has defeated sin and death. When we believe in Him, we enter His victory over sin and death, accomplished in His resurrection and ascension. We will still fall into sin from time to time; but we do not languish there. By confessing our sins and drawing on Jesus' infinite bank of forgiveness, we grow more into the light of Jesus, leaving the loneliness, darkness, and condemnation of sin forever behind. Believing the Good News means having new power to live in the freedom from sin salvation affords.

Salvation unto

But as we have suggested, being saved also brings us *to* something that we earnestly desire. We may describe this in many ways, for that to which we come in salvation is a gem with many facets.

In salvation we come to forgiveness and freedom from the condemnation that loomed over us all our days before we were saved. We come to the household of God as His adopted children, with complete right of access to His Presence. We come to a new community of people filled with the joy of the Gospel and devoted to seeking the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We come to the truth of God and the ability to understand and live by it. To all the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture. To a life of eternal meaning and significance. To the privilege and heavenly calling of being ambassadors of the eternal Kingdom and witnesses to its glorious and sovereign King. To a true understanding of ourselves, who we are, how we are comprised, what we are for, and how we shall henceforth live. To the hope of glory and the expectation of Jesus' soon return.

The Gospel—the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom—is the power of God *for* salvation, a condition so new and transforming that Paul can describe everyone who is saved as a “new creation” in whom all “old things” have passed away and everything is being made new and wonderful and glorious (2 Cor. 5.17-21).

And salvation is such wonderful Good News that all who hear and believe it can never have enough of it.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where would you turn in Scripture to help someone see what the Gospel saves us *from*?
2. Where would you turn in Scripture to help someone see what the Gospel saves us *to*?
3. Read Ephesians 2.1-10. How can you see salvation *from* and salvation *to* in this passage?

Next steps—Conversation: Talk with another Christian about the Good News of salvation. Ask to hear your friend's testimony. Can you hear both from and to in that testimony? How about in yours?

5 The Gospel Is Good News about Transformation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... 2 Corinthians 5.17, 18

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Revelation 21.5

Not a ticket to ride

I get the impression that some believers think the Gospel of Jesus Christ is like a Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free Card rather than a passage into the Kingdom of God and the joy of His Presence. When I need the card, I'll play it. For now, I don't think about it much, except, of course, on Sundays, when I'm worshiping with other cardholders.

Folks who think this way and whose faith in Jesus is of this nature do not consider that the Gospel should do much for them now. Yes, of course, it provides them a measure of comfort and assurance, and they have all these fine Christian friends to hobnob with from time to time.

But the old attitudes and aspirations that characterized them before they believed the Gospel are still present and active. They continue to grumble, complain, and grouse about things. They don't seem joyful, and they are easily angered. They don't make any time for being with Jesus in prayer and His Word, and large chunks of what they regard as their "free time" are devoted to diversions, recreation, and self-indulgences.

But there they are each week in church, holding onto their card, singing and sitting and listening to the preaching of the Word, and enjoying the "fellowship" of other cardholders, while keeping an eye on the clock.

To such people the apostle Paul would say, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified" (2 Cor. 13.5).

Christ in you

There's the key phrase: "Jesus Christ is in you." A person is disqualified as a Christian who does not have Christ dwelling in him. As we have seen, when one believes the Gospel, Jesus comes to dwell in that person by His Holy Spirit. From the moment of true conversion on, Christ is in a Christian, dwelling, working, teaching, and above all transforming believers and their world.

The Gospel is not a ticket to ride. It is, however, a license, a license to practice the Kingship of Jesus by being increasingly transformed into His likeness. The Good News of the Gospel is that Christ in us, the hope of glory, is at work to make us willing and able to be the kind of people who line up well with what pleases God (Phil. 2.13). The Holy Spirit, working with the Word of God, is daily transforming true believers to be more like Jesus.

Jesus is making all things new. We who believe in Him are new creatures by virtue of His dwelling in us. He calls us to set aside all those old things—attitudes, habits, dispositions, inclinations, time-wasters, and more—that are what He has saved us *from* and to begin growing into Him and all the newness of life He has saved us *unto*. If we're not excited about this prospect, if the promise of becoming more like Jesus doesn't thrill us and motivate us to get our time and lives in order for transformation, then we need to go back to square one—do not pass "Go", do not collect \$200—and consider whether we have truly come to know the Lord Jesus Christ at all.

But how, exactly, does that work? How does Jesus transform us into His likeness?

The privilege of the saved

Here is a mystery available only to those who truly believe in Jesus. You cannot merely patch on aspects of Jesus' character or lifestyle, like accumulating houses on the Boardwalk, and expect to know real transformation. Putting little green houses on a game board doesn't make you a rich person. It's just a game, like the game a lot of putative Christians play every week, patching on their best clothes and finest Christian lingo to mingle with their friends at church. Real transformation works from the inside-out, and only those who believe the Good News of salvation can plug into that inward-working power.

The Spirit of God in a believer is the power of the Gospel, power for transformation. And it's this power that matters, Paul insisted, not just being able to talk about it (1 Cor. 4.20). The Spirit of Jesus within a believer works to convict and convince us of any lingering or recurring sins; to point out and lead us into the path of righteousness; and to help us exercise sound judgment in practicing the Kingship of Jesus (Jn. 16.8-11). Knowing this, and thrilled at the prospect of it, Christians always seek the filling of God's Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21). They conduct their daily lives by walking in the Spirit and not in the old ways of their former life (Gal. 5.16-23). Daily they seek more of the Spirit's power to transform them into the likeness of Jesus, so that they may bear holy spiritual fruit in their lives and live as witnesses to the Lord (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Gal. 5.22, 23; Acts 1.8).

Knowing that Jesus is bent on making us more like Him, and on using us as agents of His grace to transform our world, Christians rejoice in the Good News of Christ, His Kingdom and salvation, and devote themselves to working out this great salvation with ever-greater fullness and fruit (Phil. 2.12).

And thus Christians are transformed to be more like Jesus. Old things pass away—sometimes after a long struggle. New attitudes, desires, aspirations, character traits, behaviors, conversation, and outlook begin to flourish as Jesus stretches out in a believer and makes all things new.

The Gospel is Good News about transformation. Believe the Gospel and be forever changed.

Search the Scriptures

1. What does Galatians 5.16-23 teach about the kind of transformation we should seek?
2. Jesus taught us to think about ourselves as salt, light, and leaven. How does each of these suggest a transformed and transforming way of life?
3. How do you understand the phrase "glory to glory" in 2 Corinthians 3.12-18? How does that apply to your being made more like Jesus?

Next steps—Transformation: Spend time in prayer reviewing the ways God has worked in you to make you more like Jesus. Be patient and think hard. Be sure to give Him praise and thanks throughout this time.

6 The Gospel Is Good News about Power

For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 1 Corinthians 4.20

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1.8

Power

Power is a good thing. All kinds of power.

Power gets things done, moves stuff around, and allows us to accomplish projects and tasks far beyond our human strength. If the only power human beings had to draw on was that which is inherent in our own bodies, we would everywhere be reduced to living off the land.

But tools and domesticated animals give us power to break up the ground and grow abundant food. Windmills and watermills capture sources of power beyond our strength which we can employ for good purposes. And the power of electricity, fossil fuels, sunlight, and tiny atoms, safely harnessed and properly channeled, can do much good.

By our use of power we can electrify nations, put satellites into orbit, collect and transform the rays of the sun, create culture and civilization, destroy cultures and civilizations, make a hot breakfast, drive to a ball game, watch Masterpiece™ on PBS, and on and on and on.

Yeah. Power is a good thing. Or can be a good thing.

Wouldn't we love to be able to turn those powers to other tasks? Like enabling people to love one another? Endowing them with new abilities for serving their neighbors? Making them selfless, generous, and uncomplaining? Giving them the strength to say “No” to violence or betrayal or everyday meanness? I don't know, maybe even raising them from the dead?

Whoa, T. M. No power source on earth can do those kinds of things.

Precisely.

No power on earth, but the power of the Gospel, holy spiritual power from God, can do these and exceedingly, abundantly more. Because the Good News of the Gospel is the Good News of power.

Power over sin

Christians have this power in the Person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer as the Bringer of Good News, new life, joy, and transforming grace to our souls. He is the power by which Jesus is making all things new. And His power works in us in ways that no amount or combination of earthly powers could ever achieve.

The Gospel has power over sin. The power of the Gospel enables Christians to recognize temptation, resist the desire to sin and the source of it, and grow more into the likeness of Jesus. Only spiritual power can do this, and only the power that comes with the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom.

An ancient formula—deriving from Augustine—can help us understand how Gospel power relates to sin. Before people fell into sin, when only Adam and Eve were alive, they had the power not to sin—in Latin, *posse non peccare*. At the same time, our first parents, because they were creatures, also had the power to sin:

posse peccare.

Once they fell into sin, they were wholly corrupted and could on their own do nothing *other* than sin. They were *non posse non peccare*. Those to whom the grace of God comes upon them—for a season in the Old Testament, permanently and indwelling in the New—are still able to sin—*posse peccare*—because we are still creatures and the law of sin still operates in us; but we are now, by the power of grace, able *not* to sin: *posse non peccare*. That is, Christians can resist temptation and work to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7.1).

And the glorious and ultimate Good News regarding the power of the Gospel is that in the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness dwells, we who have believed the Gospel and have been glorified in our bodies will be *not able to sin*: not merely *posse non peccare* but *non posse peccare*. Think of it!

Power over death and hell

This is because of the Gospel's power over death and hell. The spiritual power of the Gospel triumphs over the death of our physical bodies. It has power to deliver us immediately into the Presence of Jesus Christ and to reconstitute our bodies, completely transformed and glorious, for eternal life and bliss with Him.

There is no power like the power of the Gospel. It is the power of Jesus Christ Himself, dwelling in us by His Spirit and working to make us more like Him. So certain, so strong, so proven and reliable is this power to transform and keep us that it can even sustain us amid the terrors of life in a sin-wracked world and embolden and comfort us in the face of the threats of men. Knowing this, we may seek the power of the Gospel for all the holy energy it engenders to deliver us from the grip of sin and transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us (Heb. 13. 5, 6):

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say:

"The LORD is my helper;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?"

The Gospel is the Good News of power.

Search the Scriptures

1. According to Acts 1.8, why is this power given to us?
2. What is the Spirit of God trying to do in us? See 2 Cor. 3.12-18; Phil. 2.12; Jn. 16.8-11
3. How many ways do you see the power of the Gospel at work in the book of Acts?

Next steps—Preparation: Today, call on the Lord for His power to continue making all things new in you and to make you a witness for Jesus and about Him and His power. Then go in that power to carry out what you have requested.

7 The Gospel Is Good News about Hope

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Romans 8.23-25

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... 1 Peter 3.15

Given up on hope?

Ours is becoming a generation that has given up on hope. People these days live only for the moment: *carpe diem!* Seize the day! seems to be for many people either their battle cry or their life preserver. This phenomenon has a name: Presentism.

As Alan Jacobs puts it, people today are locked in “the present moment. There’s no time to think about anything else than the *Now*, and the *not-Now* increasingly takes on the character of an unwelcome and, in its otherness, even befouling imposition” (*Breaking Bread with the Dead*). This approach to life has little use for the past. And the future is not something we can do anything about. We need to live for the moment, milking it for all it’s worth and then moving on to the next as it arrives.

What hope people have is either consumed or evaporated in the moment, the now. All those trapped in presentism can hope for is that they won’t miss anything important that this moment has for them. They are face down in the moment, feeding frenetically on its fleeting fare. They have exchanged frenzy for hope. Life no longer exists in the promise beyond the rainbow but in the daily shark feed of staying alive.

So when such people meet someone who expresses a real and buoyant hope, they may be piqued. They may even, Peter explains, ask a reason for the hope that is in them and shows on their faces, glows through their demeanor, buoys them with bright aspirations, and permeates all their conversations.

Perhaps it’s not so much that our generation has given up on hope as that they have simply forgotten about it. And this lapse can provide powerful opportunities for Christians to share the Gospel with our contemporaries. For the Good News of the Gospel is hope. And the hope that is such Good News is Jesus.

The hope of glory—then

The apostle Paul wrote that one overarching hope of our calling motivates the disciples of Jesus Christ: To know the glory of God—His grace in Jesus Christ, working in us and through us unto the praise of and for thanksgiving to the Father.

A day is coming when for all eternity those who have known the Lord and embraced the Good News of the Gospel will enjoy His glory with uninterrupted bliss. We stand, the apostle Paul insisted, in the hope of glory, knowing that one day our bodies will be transformed to be like the glorified body of our Lord Himself (Rom. 5.1, 2; 1 Cor. 15.19-28; 50-57). We will be radiant, full of joy and gladness, surrounded with like-minded and glorified friends and other creatures, abounding in good works, free of all sin and sorrow, and eternally more joyful with each passing moment. And we will be continually before God in all His glory as He lights our way and everything we do.

The Christian’s great hope is the hope of eternal life in the new heavens and new earth, in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just thinking about this can make us smile or sing or break out in “Hallelujah!” and throw our arms around one another. Our Presentist neighbors know nothing of this, and when they see us hoping for glory in such ways, they may ask a reason for it.

The hope of glory—now

But Christians live in the hope of glory not only for the there and then. Here and now we have abundant opportunities for serving the Lord and in doing so, refracting the glory of Jesus Christ to the world. We have seen that God is at work within us to make us more like Jesus day by day (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As Jesus increases in us and we decrease (Jn. 1.30), more of Him will be seen in us—in our character, demeanor, work, words, and actions—as His glory refracts through us, projecting the image of Jesus in and through our unique personage out into our world.

Paul said we make it our aim that in everything we do, even down to the most quotidian activities, we want to glorify God (1 Cor. 10.31), so that something about Jesus can be seen in every aspect of our lives. The challenge and thrill of this motivates Christians to know more of the transforming grace and power of the Lord at work in our lives. For we understand that we have been sent into the world as witnesses for the Lord Jesus—not merely to *do* witnessing but to *be* witnesses, that the life of Jesus might flow like living water from us to refresh and renew our world to the full reach of our powers (Acts 1.8; Jn. 7.37-39).

Beginning and living each day in the hope of glory *now* taps into the power of God's Word and Spirit so that the disciples of Jesus—Who dwells by His Spirit in the depths of their souls—are moved to seek His Kingdom and righteousness and fulfill their unique calling in such a way that the glory of God, in measures slight and slamming, comes through in all they say and do. This hope fills and overflows to each moment of their lives.

And people trapped in the present, people who have forgotten about the idea of hope, when they have to do with such hope-filled people, may be inclined to ask a reason for the joy, industry, thoroughness, satisfaction, and lack of complaining and whining that attends all we do.

Christians are a people of hope, because the Good News of hope has come to dwell in our souls and is transforming us powerfully, from glory to glory, into the image of Jesus Christ.

Search the Scriptures

1. How would you explain the idea of the glory of God to an unbelieving friend? Where would you turn in Scripture?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 4.16-18. How does Paul refer to glory here? What does that suggest about it?
3. Review 1 Corinthians 10.31. So far this day, what opportunities have you had to glorify God?

Next steps—Transformation: What can you do to be more conscious of the opportunities to glorify God that come your way each day?

What Is the Gospel?

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Why is the Gospel such “Good News”?
2. Why might people today be interested to know that the Gospel is Good News of transformation?
3. How should knowing that the Gospel is Good News of power affect the way we as Christians live?
4. What is the Christian’s hope? What makes this such “Good News”?
5. What’s the most important lesson you have learned from this study?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.