

**what
I love
about**

THE GOSPEL

**a blog
book by
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another line for effect

WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THE GOSPEL

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1

INTRODUCTION

I LOVE THE GOSPEL.

A lot.

In thinking about this topic I've come to the conclusion that there is nothing I love more than the gospel. While this might seem pious at first, that is not at all my intent. As much as I love my wife and sons, I have to recognize that without the gospel there would be no basis for the life that I desire for them. It is the gospel that provides a foundation for purpose, meaning and hope.

This is a very easy topic for me to focus entirely on the positive – on what I love. If we were discussing Christianity as a whole, there would certainly be things I like, things I dislike; things I love as well as things I think are detrimental. If we were talking about the church – again, there would be both positive and negative. But, when we are talking

about the gospel – there is nothing bad to say at all. The only imperfections in the gospel story deal with us – and not with God – which makes the gospel all the more glorious.

The gospel is the story (the true story) of God writing himself into human history. It is the story of God writing himself into our story. C.S. Lewis used the illustration of Shakespeare's plays to communicate the necessity of the gospel. The only way that one of Shakespeare's characters in any of his plays could ever know him, would be through the author of the play writing himself into the story. Pastor and author Tim Keller makes a similar observation in Dorothy Sayers' Wimsey novels. Keller suggests that Sayers fell in love with the character she created and then wrote herself into the story in the person of Harriet Vane in order to have a relationship with her creation. Like Lady Macbeth, or Lord Peter Wimsey, we would be lost if the author of our story had not written himself into the plot.

This is the gospel – God has written himself into our story – into human history. If we didn’t have the gospel we would have no basis for morality, no basis for hope, no basis for fidelity. As the New Testament states, “we love him because he first loved us.” God loves us and he has written himself into our story. The Apostle John recorded this concept in these words, “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.”

That’s the gospel.

And I love it!

2

THE GOSPEL BRINGS
Clarity TO OUR *CONFUSION*

WELCOME TO POSTMODERNISM.

Welcome to the truth confused culture. Welcome to the new relativism that accepts all claims as equally valid. Unequivocally equal. Unequivocally valid. Unless it is an absolute truth claim. Unless it is the gospel.

Our immediate reaction to the cultural confusion is well described in the opening paragraph of Simon Blackburn's Book "Truth: A Guide" published by Oxford Press in 2005:

"There are real standards. We must fight soggy nihilism, skepticism and cynicism. We must not believe that anything goes. We must not believe that all opinion is ideology, that reason is only power, that there is not truth to prevail. Without defenses against postmodern irony

and cynicism, multiculturalism and relativism, we will all go to hell in a hand basket.”

You might imagine someone in the back right section of your local church shouting amen after hearing such a statement. However, Blackburn is only being coy. He continues, “So thunders the conservative half of us — of each of us. But perhaps the thunder and conviction betray an anxiety. We fear that there is another side to it, that our confidence is dogma, that our bluff may be called.” Okay, so your vocal church members might not amen this. Welcome to postmodernity.

One of the things I love about the gospel is that it clearly and concisely explains reality. The gospel answers the major questions that every human being has to face. Where did we come from? What’s wrong with the world? What’s the solution? All of these, and many more, are answered by the gospel. The gospel brings clarity to our confusion.

But the gospel is not welcome in our culture. It's offensive. I guess Jesus was right after all. The gospel is a divisive issue. Why are we surprised? You can talk about Jesus until you are blue in the face as long as you don't talk of the gospel as being categorically true. We are comfortable with Jesus as a role model or Rabbi, but not as the Savior who is the exclusive path to salvation. We can talk about Jesus being whoever we want him to be. We just cannot let him speak for himself. When a person shares the true gospel the relativism of the day suddenly drops its culturally congenial spirit and resorts to name-calling. This is usually the first line of action of someone who is losing a debate.

The gospel doesn't lead to reality-blinded believers or idle-minded idiots. (disclaimer: there are Christian wack jobs out there – I'm just saying that this is neither the intent nor the typical result of believing the gospel). The Apostle Paul

described the transformative force of the gospel in an individual's life as producing an orderly and firm faith able to withstand finely-tuned counter claims and contrary philosophies (see Colossians 2). The gospel doesn't cover up or skew the issues we face in real life. It clarifies them.

We live in a confused culture. The band Pennywise expressed this sentiment well in their lyrics, "Won't someone take this all away. Take this confusion all away. We need the answers here today. Unanswered questions all around. No conclusions for us now." This is sad. No answers nor conclusions for us now. But that is not the case with the gospel. The gospel answers our most important questions. The gospel brings clarity to our confusion.

Author James Sire provides a powerful summary of the gospel as a worldview:

“...Christian theism is primarily dependent on its concept of God, for theism holds that everything stems from him. Nothing is prior to God or equal to him. He is He Who Is. Thus theism has a basis for metaphysics. Since He Who Is also has a worthy character and is thus The Worthy One, theism has a basis for ethics. Since He Who Is also is He Who Knows, theism has a basis for epistemology. In other words, theism is a complete worldview.”

The gospel is a complete worldview. It brings clarity to our confusion. It answers our questions.

That's the gospel.

And I love it.

3

THE GOSPEL BRINGS
Grace TO OUR *GUILT*

You're a guilty sinner.

Every person who has ever walked the planet understands guilt. It is hardwired into our DNA. Guilt is universal. Everyone feels it and everyone has to deal with it. The real question is “Where does guilt come from?” Furthermore, if guilt is a global epidemic then we must ask, “How do we eradicate the world of such a vice?”

Guilt is symptomatic. To treat guilt alone is like treating a runny nose. If you want to cure the symptoms you have to address the cause. But that brings up another question, “What is the cause?” The gospel explains both the cause and the solution.

The opening pages of Scripture reveal that God created the world out of nothing. Into this creation God placed the first man and woman. Eve, when tempted by Satan, succumbed to his evil plot. Adam fol-

lowed. He followed. He should have stepped up and crushed the head of the snake, but instead he simply followed. The rest of the Bible is the grand story of God righting the wrong brought about by Adam and Eve.

All of Scripture is a narrative of Jesus coming to do what Adam should have done in the beginning. Adam should have stepped up as king of the garden. He should have denied the snake. He should have protected his bride. And so, sin and consequently guilt entered the world. We have inherited a sin nature from our patriarch Adam and we feel the guilt and shame that he felt. Problem: sin. Symptom: guilt.

So what is the solution? God promised Eve that one of her offspring would crush the head of the serpent. In the following years prophecies provided specific details as to the lineage and circumstances that would surround the birth of God's chosen one. Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph with a holy mission from his Father.

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In dying on the cross, Jesus disarmed the enemy and in his resurrection he has triumphed over the snake.

Problem: *sin*

Symptom: *guilt*

Solution: *Jesus*

COLOSSIANS 2:13-15
summarizes this well:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

While in our present day we have tried to psychoanalyze away the reality and

responsibility of sin, no one can deny the lingering power of guilt. Our moral equilibrium is out of balance. We can weave together theories that guilt is a social construct, or we can blame our mothers, or attribute it to religious fanaticism. What we can't do is make it go away on our own.

John Bunyan penned the parable of "Pilgrim's Progress" from a prison cell (try saying that ten times). In this wonderful work of fiction, a character named Christian escapes the city of Destruction in the hope that he can find a way to rid himself of a great burden that he carries on his back. Along his journey he meets many people like Civility, Legality, Pliable and Mr. Worldly Wiseman. However, it is not until he comes to the foot of the cross that his burden is finally relieved. Bunyan was illustrating for us the truth that the gospel alone can bring grace to our guilt.

By faith in the risen Christ we receive forgiveness of our sins. God's revealed

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plan is not a human self-improvement project. It's divine intervention. It's a rescue mission. It's grace.

That's the gospel.

And I love it.

4

THE GOSPEL BRINGS
Meaning TO OUR MORTALITY

*“It is always consoling to think
of suicide: in that way one gets
through many a bad night.”*

– FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

I believe the gospel is the best explanation of existence and reality. Without the gospel we would all be backed into a corner and forced to recognize the meaninglessness of life. In short, I believe the gospel explains where we came from – and – why we are here. If we can't answer the “where” question, then we have difficulty coming up with an answer to the “why” question. The gospel answers both the “where” and the “why” of humanity.

I love the gospel because it brings meaning to our mortality. Because of the gospel we can have purpose. Because of the gospel both life and death have significance, value and meaning. Because of the gospel we marvel at the birth of human life and we have hope at the graveside of a fellow Christian. This is the gospel – we have hope, purpose and meaning.

Purpose is impossible apart from the gospel. The philosophy known as nihilism is a great example of this. It is thought by many to be the logical conclusion of atheism. Nihilism is the sober recognition that if there is no God then there can be no meaning or purpose. There cannot be significance or purpose apart from the existence of a creator God. The gospel declares that there is a God above who gives meaning to life below. While many try to create some sort of existential purpose on their own, a more honest response is to recognize that there can be no real purpose apart from a transcendent and personal God.

There seem to be few who are willing to recognize and live with the ramifications of rejecting the existence of God. Nietzsche was one of them. Nietzsche took his atheism seriously. The fact that he died in an insane and depressed state serves as a commentary on his view that life itself was meaningless. Some would say that

he took his philosophy as far as he could take it – and then it took him.

Samuel Beckett provided a clear picture of this worldview in his play “Breath”. This 35-second play begins with a dark stage. The audience hears someone inhale – then a baby cries as the spotlight illuminates a pile of garbage on the stage. While the light dims, the audience hears a person exhale and the play is over. This is life without purpose or meaning. This is life without God.

Richard Dawkins is a famous atheist (or anti-theist) who has seemingly made peace with the fact that there is no God. Dawkins doesn’t need God to live a purposeful and fulfilled life (or so it seems). However, some of his followers seem to be struggling exhibiting the same optimism. On Dawkins’ blog one fan wrote:

“In the past few months I’ve been having, from what I understand the term to mean, nihilistic thoughts when pondering what I call “The Big

Questions” (usually after a toke or two). I know that Richard and others have said before that you give life your own meaning and that we create our own purpose in life, but aren’t we just really bull - - - - - ourselves?

I mean in a few hundred years we will all be dead and no one will remember our names or actions (maybe Richard, but you get my point). After that, in millions of years the human race will be gone and what will all this have meant? What end goal are we striving towards? Is existence really the only reason to persist in life? I am just having trouble caring about what seem to be trivial activities in my daily life now. Why should I care what laws my government is passing anymore than I care about what laws the Assyrians were subjected to? What does it matter?

All these questions! I’m sorry to dump so much out in a single post, but as I was lying in bed coming to terms with the fact that my life (and the entire universe for that matter)

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pretty much exists without meaning, I had what I suppose was a panic attack. It was a terrifying experience. Anyone else experience this?"

There were some interesting responses to the initial post – none of which seemed to satisfy the original blogger. One person tried to encourage this fellow by pointing to the possibilities of scientific discovery as the hope for our mortality:

"Consider the following: Through science, we may be able to find a cure for aging. It may even happen within your lifetime if you don't get yourself killed trying to make the most of it. Who says we can't have eternal life without spirituality."

The concluding statements of the initial blogger are powerful:

"Which is what I am having trouble coming to grips with. I'm just a chemical reaction that the physical laws of the universe are trying to continue. I'm meaningless..."

It's interesting that the only hope that could be offered was to imagine a world where we could achieve *immortality apart from God*. Songwriter John Lennon tried to get us to imagine a similar vision. He sang, "Imagine there's no heaven -It's easy if you try -No hell below us. Above us only sky -Imagine all the people -Living for today..." Lennon thought a world without God would be a utopia. People would be free to "live for today" with no outside pressures or concerns. What he failed to recognize is that this sort of vision comes at a cost. In denying a God "above" we are left with no meaning "below." As the blogger on Dawkins' website wrote – we would be "meaningless."

I would like to imagine a different kind of world than that of Lennon's. To be honest we need not imagine at all. The gospel is the historical account of God the Father, sending the Son to die as a substitute for the sins of the world, who was then raised by the Spirit conquering sin,

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death, and the grave. The gospel is the good news that we can have clarity instead of confusion, grace instead of guilt, and meaning in life.

That's the Gospel.

And I love it.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:1-4

about this blog book:

This booklet is taken from four blog entries that I posted at theolatte.com

The content is based on a sermon that I preached at the campus church. Over the next year I plan to take my sermons series and turn them into blog posts - and when helpful - turn them into blog books like this one. The sermon was based on Colossians 2 and 3. For further study I would encourage you to read through Colossians. If you have questions or comments about the content please email me at: ddewitt@sbts.edu.

thecampuschurch.info

“We exist to generate a movement
of the gospel on the campus of
the University of Louisville which
transforms lives, builds community
and advances the Kingdom of God.”