

# THE GOSPEL

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## GOD'S GREAT RESCUE



### INTRODUCTION:

The gospel message is not just something that we believe once. It is something that we, as Christians, need to believe every day of our lives. The same message that saves us from sin, is the very same message that keeps restoring and changing us into the likeness of Christ. We never graduate from the gospel and, in fact, as we grow as believers, we become more and more dependent on God's grace for each and every area of our lives, as we begin to realise our desperate need for him. For many of us, this series is going to be a great reminder of our ongoing need for the gospel.

Another reason that we, as a church, need to look at the gospel again, in its simplicity, is because, throughout the ages, the gospel message has been corrupted. As a result, both Christians and non-Christians alike, have developed some warped views of God, which have obviously shaped their view of their need for, and their ability to receive, God's gift of salvation. So, although this series is hugely helpful in presenting the gospel to our non-churched friends and family, it is equally as important for us, as a community of believers, to allow the simple truths of the gospel to confront our current theology, and for us to question if we truly believe it.

It is then essential for us, at the beginning of this series, to choose to engage intentionally with the gospel message with our hearts, and not just with our intellects, as if it were a mere philosophical idea to be pondered. If the gospel is true, and if we believe it, then it must and will change the way we live in every area of our lives.

Perhaps the best way for us to start the series, is to have a time of self-examination/reflection, and to ask ourselves whether the different areas of our lives are, in fact, submitted to Christ in obedience. Our obedience to Christ is the evidence that the gospel truth has transformed our minds, gripped our hearts, and turned our affections towards him (which changes our posture from a self-centred one to a God-centred one). If we claim to have been changed by the gospel but are not submitted to Christ in our day-to-day lives, then our love for him may not quite what we thought it was. This is a sobering reality for many of us who tend to be religious in our thinking, because we instinctively feel as though, if we keep to our own set of moral rules, then God is happy with us and we are good-to-go. But this is faulty and dangerously misleading theology, and it needs to be transformed by the gospel.

So, wherever on the journey with Christ you might be, during this series, allow yourself to be honest with where you are at, and then respond by allowing the Holy Spirit to draw your heart towards Christ, in love, affection and obedience.

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### WEEK 1: THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

Text: Romans 11:33-36

The God of the gospel is the beautiful God of the great tensions: he is just and yet merciful, independent and yet relational, transcendent and yet incarnational, righteous and yet loving.

#### 1. JUST AND YET MERCIFUL

- Read Deuteronomy 4:31 & Ephesians 2:4

God is perfectly just and has promised to eventually judge evil once and for all. This is good news for those of us who have suffered at the hands of others, but it is also potentially terrifying for those of us who know that we have lived imperfect lives and deserve some sort of judgment for the things we have thought, said or done – in other words, for any of us with a conscience. The fear of God is appropriate because all sin will be dealt with. But while the reality of his coming judgment should be on our minds, so should the mercy of God. Though we deserve judgment for sin, God placed it on Jesus Christ and punished him in our place. And so instead of living in fear of God's judgment, we can run to him for mercy instead.

- ❖ Q: Why is God's justice essential to him being a good father?
- ❖ Q: Which side of the spectrum do you tend to fall on to: the side that is terrified of God's judgment, where you fear being in trouble all the time, or the other side, which does not take God's justice into account at all, but rather lives in the mercy of God, as though sin is not an issue to God?
- ❖ Q: Why is living in God's mercy alone, and not remembering or considering his justice, not really a Christian perspective? Explain.

#### 2. INDEPENDENT AND YET RELATIONAL

Many of us have the wrong perception of how God relates to us. We might think that he is needy of our company, affection and obedience, and that when we don't give him what he wants, he will react by making our lives difficult. This belief drives us into performance mode, where we do what it takes to keep God "happy". The other, but equally wrong, perspective we tend to have, is that God is merely a "buddy", who is always there, but has no power or authority in or over our lives. Functionally, he is a bit like a lucky charm or a saint to keep watch over us.

God is independent, "other" and complete. Because he exists as three-in-one (the Trinity), he is perfectly unified and content within himself. He does not need humanity, but has created us for his enjoyment, and for us to partner with him in his great work. God is not needy and not reliant on us in any way, and yet he loves us with an everlasting love.

- ❖ Q: Why is it a shock for some of us to realise that God's focus is rightfully on himself rather than on us?
- ❖ Q: Do you ever feel as though God needs you to do something or to be a particular way? If so, explain why.
- ❖ Q: Why is it actually liberating to know that God wants us (and doesn't need us)?

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### 3. TRANSCENDENT AND YET INCARNATIONAL

- Read Isaiah 55:8, Romans 11:34 & Philippians 2:7

Though we believe intellectually that God came down in human form, most of us find it very difficult to embrace and believe in God's transcendence (*his existing apart from, and not subject to, the limitations of the material universe*) at the same time. We tend to either over-realise God's incarnation (human form) or over-realise his transcendence. But the glory of the gospel requires that we dwell in the tension of both. The Bible is full of examples of where mankind tried to understand the mind of God only to realise how foolish it was, and how, in reality, God is so far beyond our comprehension. But then the New Testament shows how God poured himself out into human flesh and lived fully as a human being, with the same struggles and weaknesses we face in our general humanity.

- ❖ Q: Which of the two do you find more difficult to hold to: God's transcendence or his incarnation. Explain why you think that is.
- Q: Why is it important for us to hold to both God's transcendence as well as to embrace his incarnation?

### 4. HOLY AND YET LOVING

- Read 1 Peter 1:16 & John 3:16

In our generation, the word "holy" has become associated with religious bigotry and arrogance. But that is so far removed from the meaning God intends when he calls himself holy. In his case, it means that he is morally pure, without blemish and totally set apart. It is an attribute of highest integrity and honour, one that we should respect and admire deeply. And while he is so utterly holy, he is, at the very same time, filled with and motivated by his love for us. So much so that, in order to rescue us from sin, he sent his holy son to die in our place, so that those of us who believe in him would have eternal life (which starts the minute we cross the line of faith and are reconciled back into relationship with him). His love is extravagant and selfless. This only adds to the magnificence of his holiness and perfection, and should evoke nothing less than a heart full of gratitude and worship towards him.

- ❖ Q: Prior to this message, what came to mind when you thought of God's holiness, or the call for Christians to live holy lives?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think people these days misunderstand God's holiness as a negative character trait?
- ❖ Q: When you think of God's call for you to live a holy life, what do you think that means?
- ❖ Q: Why is it important to hold God's love and holiness together, and not drop or minimize one of them to try and resolve the tension?

#### Personal Reflection Question:

- ❖ Q: What is the one big take away from this week's message that God is asking you to apply to your life this week in either your beliefs, attitudes, responses or actions?