

# What Is The Gospel?

*By Christopher Coffman*

When the 24-hour news cycle first appeared in the early 1980s, it was hailed as a revolution—a way to keep us more informed, connected, and aware than ever before. Four decades later, we are the most informed people in history—and perhaps the most anxious as well.

Somewhere along the way, the flood of information began shaping us in ways no one expected. We gained access to the whole world, but in the process, we've lost touch with our own souls. The scroll of headlines confronts us daily with what's broken in the world but offers no cure. Each day brings fresh reports of conflict and corruption, disaster and despair. Is it any wonder so many of us feel exhausted, distracted, and overwhelmed these days?

And yet, beneath the noise, something in us still aches for more. That longing isn't an illusion—it's a divine imprint. Centuries ago, Augustine put words to that ache: *"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."*<sup>1</sup> We try to fill that restlessness with work, pleasure, or distraction, but the emptiness remains.

It's here—right in the midst of our weary, fractured world—that the Gospel writers announce a different kind of headline: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10–11)

The Gospel is, quite literally, *good news*—the announcement that God has entered human history to make all things new. But before the Gospel can bring us "good news of great joy," it first must confront us with the bad news.

## The Bad News Before the Good

The Bible begins with a world ordered by God's goodness and overflowing with His grace (Gen. 1–2). God created humanity in His image—to know Him, love Him, and live under His life-giving rule. But instead of trusting our Creator, we turned from Him (Gen. 3). Sin entered the story, and with it came separation, shame, and death—fracturing everything God had made good.

And that story isn't just ancient history; it's the story of us all. As the Apostle Paul puts it, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Rom. 3:23)

Sin isn't simply the breaking of God's rules—it's the breaking of relationship.

Biblically speaking, sin is first and foremost relational before it is moral. It is our attempt to live apart from the One who gives us life—and it's left a fracture running through our hearts, our relationships, and the world itself. No amount of progress, morality, or religion can repair what sin has undone. We can change habits but not hearts; manage behavior but not remove guilt.

Try as we might, we cannot save ourselves.

That's why the Gospel doesn't begin with what we do for God—it begins with what God has done for us.

## Good News, Not Advice

When Jesus and the Gospel writers used the word *euangelion*—"good news"—they were tapping into a term already charged with meaning. In the Greco-Roman world, *euangelion* wasn't religious language; it was imperial language. It was how rulers announced history-altering events—the birth of a ruler, the victory of a war, the rise of a new king. Such news wasn't advice to follow; it was the declaration of something that had already happened—an event so significant it redefined reality for everyone who heard it.

Unlike every other worldview that offers advice—a path to climb up to God—the Gospel announces that God has come down to us. Instead of beginning with what we must do, it begins and ends with what Christ has done. Which is why, when the apostle Paul summarized the heart of the Christian message, he didn't begin with moral instruction or spiritual technique.

Instead, he announces: *"Christ died for our sins ... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day."* (1 Cor. 15:3–4)

That confession captures the shape of the Gospel—the saving death and victorious resurrection of Jesus. But Paul doesn't stop there. A few verses later he adds, *"Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father ... For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."* (1 Cor. 15:24–25)

In those few verses, we glimpse the full sweep of the Gospel—the Cross, where grace saves; the Resurrection, where life triumphs; and the Kingdom, where Christ reigns to make all things new.

## A Holistic Gospel for a Hurting World

The Gospel is not one-dimensional. At its center stand the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Kingdom—each essential to the hope it holds. Like the three legs of a stool, all are needed to bear the full weight of God's redeeming work. Remove one, and the message begins to wobble.

Still, most of us lean on one leg more than the others. Some rest in the forgiveness of the Cross but overlook the power of the Resurrection. Others long for the renewal of the Kingdom but forget the grace that makes it possible. Each truth is beautiful, but only together do they reveal the fullness of the Gospel.

Christopher Wright puts it plainly: "We need a holistic gospel because the world is in a holistic mess."<sup>2</sup> It's a profound insight—and a sobering one. In every generation, we face the temptation to shrink the Gospel—to trade the fullness of God's good news for smaller versions of our own making. Some look to politics, others to progress or personal fulfillment, each promising a kind of salvation. But only the whole Gospel—rooted in Christ's Cross, Resurrection, and Kingdom—can truly set people free.

To a culture obsessed with self-actualization, it says: *You have been crucified with Christ. Life is no longer about you, but Christ who lives in you and loves you* (Gal 2:20).

To a culture sinking into despair, it says: *Christ is risen, and because He lives, your hope is not in vain* (1 Cor. 15:20, 58).

To a culture addicted to outrage, it says: *Forgiveness is possible because justice has been satisfied* (Rom. 5:8–9).

To a culture paralyzed by fear, it says: *There is a King whose Kingdom cannot be shaken* (Heb. 12:28).

And if we're honest, every one of us feels the pull to look for good news somewhere else—to anchor our hope in something easier, smaller, or more immediate than Christ Himself. Yet those other small gospels promise life but leave us restless and empty. Only Jesus can set us free, and only His Gospel can make us whole.

## Living as Good News People

As we dwell deeply on the fullness of the Gospel, it begins to reshape us from the inside out—changing what we love, how we live, and how we see the world.

Through it, God is forming a people shaped by hope—good news people. People who live as if resurrection is true. Who love when it costs them, forgive when it's undeserved, and remain faithful when others walk away. People whose ordinary lives become living previews of the Kingdom Christ is bringing to earth.

While none of us reflect the Gospel flawlessly, we must strive to carry it faithfully. And as we do, the Gospel we believe becomes visible—a living headline of hope in a world in desperate need of good news.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book I, Ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 30.