

I want to ask one simple question. What is the gospel? I would guess if I were to go around and ask what the gospel is there'd be a litany of similar, but different answers. We'd all have the same sense of it. It's one of those words that we've grown so familiar with that we are unfamiliar with it. That closeness to it has blinded us to see the nuances and the beauty of what the gospel is.

I imagine if we were to ask that question, we'd get answers such as the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross from my sin, so I can go to heaven when I die. Or the gospel is that Jesus can do it, and I can't, so I put my faith in him. Or the gospel is that Jesus came to dismantle structures of oppression and injustice. The gospel is that Jesus came to make us healthy and wealthy.

There's a lot of truth in those things I just stated, and we'll talk more about that. But the really important point, which seems quite obvious, is if we misunderstand the gospel, we go off the rails quite quickly into different areas and lose the focus, the thing that's holding it all together. I know of no better place to answer what the gospel is than to ask the question, "What is the gospel that Jesus preached?"

It seems like that should be a very fundamental starting place. What is the gospel according to Jesus? So flip your Bibles to Mark 1. Your Bible may have a phrase that is correct to the Greek, "The Gospel of Mark" or "The Gospel According to Mark." That phrase in the Greek is *Euangelion kata Markon*, which can be translated "The Gospel of Mark," or it could be translated "The Gospel According to Mark." Each of the four Gospels follows that same formula: *Euangelion* kata Matthew, or Luke or John. So when you open the book, the very beginning thing we hear is *Euangelion* or good news. That's fundamentally what the gospel is. It's good news.

N.T. Wright talks about the difference in his great little book, *Simply Good News*, that most of us come to the gospel and think of it as advice, but the good news isn't advice. It just is. It's the proclamation of an event that took place in which the whole world is now different. The gospel is good news about an event, about a moment in time in which something happened that changed everything.

The word *Euangelion* means gospel or good news; both mean the exact same thing and contrary to popular belief, the word gospel is not originally a religious word. The gospel originally in the ancient world was just that good news. Often, what would happen in the ancient world, particularly around the enthrallment of a

new king or ruler, is they would send out evangelists or preachers who would go out and tell of the good news of the new king's enthronement.

Back in Ancient Rome when a new Caesar came into power and authority, think about the Roman Civil War, there was this tussle over who was going to step into power, and there was a new Caesar that took that throne and took that position of authority. Archeologists all over the ancient world have found this inscription in many, many different places that used the word gospel. Look at this one from the Priene inscription from 9 BC, a little bit before the time of Jesus. This is an inscription about a new Caesar.

He [Caesar] might end the war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance, excelled, even our anticipations, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings (*Euangelion*), for the world that came by reason of him. The Priene Inscription, 9 BC

Here's an ancient inscription in which they're looking at Caesar, and they're saying this Caesar is one. Did you catch the phrase earlier? The son of god, the son of Augustus. Those were claims that the Caesars would take onto themselves, filled with all sorts of hubris. It takes quite a bit of hubris to call yourself the son of god. And yet Caesar was stepping on the scene and assuming himself as that son of god, and people around were spreading this message of the gospel, that the world would be set right.

A quick history lesson will teach us that wasn't, in fact, the Caesar in Rome to set the world to right. They would go on to rule in a way known as the Pax Romana, which was peace through Rome. But what you came to understand was that this good news was only good news if you were on Rome's side. If you're on the other side of Rome, it felt much more like violence, domination, oppression, and injustice. This is the claim that the ancient world was making. That there was a good news event, and it was that the Caesar had arrived.

But let's look at Mark 1:1, "The Gospel According to Mark." "*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God,*" (Mark 1:1). Does that sound at all familiar to what we just read? Mark, in many ways, is understanding the culture around him. He is subverting the very story that's taking place in the ancient world to say, "Listen, this is the true gospel." This is the beginning. The very first point of the starting of the actual good news

of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. The first thing we learn about the gospel is that if Jesus is the Messiah, he is the Lord. Well, then, that means Caesar is not the son of god, nor the Lord. It subverts it at the very beginning.

This message of the gospel is one that was undergirding the ancient world in which this small group was starting to come awake to the reality of life that Jesus was, in fact, the true Lord. Not Caesar, not any politician, not any system of government, not any economic model, nothing that the world could contrive, none of that is actual good news. This good news is of Jesus the Messiah.

Scott McKnight, in his brilliant book called *The King Jesus Gospel*, makes the point that we often miss. That here in verse 1, it says the beginning of the gospel, which means for Mark, anything that follows between chapter 1 to chapter 16 is the gospel. That's why it's called the "Gospel According to Mark." It seems so obvious, but we miss it.

It doesn't mean the back half of Jesus' life. It doesn't mean the last three quarters. It means the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to heaven; all of that is the gospel. So Scott McKnight just reminds us, as simple as it is, that the gospels are the gospel, which he's got a lot of letters behind his name, and I don't think he needed them to find that statement, but we often forget it. The gospels are the gospel, the story of Jesus. This is the gospel.

Let's unpack that a little bit further. Let's arrive at what I would call The Gospel Assumption. This is the stories that we typically come to believe the gospel is. I borrowed this from Tim Mackey of The Bible Project. He says, this gospel here, this is the story that most of us believe about the gospel, particularly those who are outside these walls. We exist on earth, and we're living our life. We try to do good things. I'm going to do a lot of good things, and that's going to propel me forward into life. I occasionally screw up, but hopefully, when I get to that fork in the road called death, when Jesus meets me at that moment, I'll be assigned to heaven. That's the story that most of us assume the gospel is. Some of you might be here thinking, isn't that the story?

We're going to tell a little bit of a different story because the only problem with this story is the Bible. The Bible's the problem with this story. The Bible tells a different story. We've reduced the gospel to it being about getting to heaven or staying out of hell. But that isn't quite the story the scriptures tell, and it's particularly not the gospel that Jesus preached.

Let's go to Mark 1:14. "*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.*" There's our word gospel, *Euangelion*, proclaiming the Gospel of God, meaning whatever Jesus says next is the gospel. Jesus went about preaching the gospel; it says quite clearly right there in verse 14. So, what is the gospel that Jesus preached? "*The time has come,*" he said. "*The*

kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (v. 15). The three aspects to the gospel of Jesus: The time has come. The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Let's walk through each one individually.

The Time Has Come

First, the gospel that Jesus begins with is this concept that the time has come. Now, there are two ways to think about time. There's chronological time, which means one thing after another, so it's a series of events. Then there's another word for it, which is the Greek word *kairos*. This understanding of time is like when your pregnant wife says, "It's time." It's the moment you grab the bag and go to the hospital. Like it's time, it's the appointed time. It's the time that everything has been waiting for. It's the time in which all the hope that you've been holding onto has arrived at this particular moment.

This is the word Jesus used, the *kairos*, the time has come. Meaning that Jesus found himself as that story, the gospel he preaches as part of a much larger story. If the time has come, that means there was a time that preceded that, meaning Jesus views himself as the climax, the culmination of a much longer story that's unfolding from Genesis to Revelation.

In the Old Testament, there was this hope, this longing. Jesus sees himself as that culmination. It's the time that the people of Israel have been longing for, waiting and hoping for, looking out over the horizon, saying, "Would that time come when the kingdom of God would arrive?" This is the culmination of that larger story. Jesus comes on the scene. He begins to preach the gospel, and says, "The time has come." Well, what was it time for?

The Kingdom Of God Has Come Near

The kingdom of God has come near. This is what I would claim is the thesis statement of all of Jesus' teaching. If you were to summarize everything that Jesus taught, did and was about, it would be this line: The kingdom of God has come near. A couple things we have to note.

The Word Kingdom

First, the word kingdom. It's the word *basileia*. We live in America. We quite intentionally broke free from kingdoms way back in our independence. So, this concept of kingdom is a bit foreign to us. Most of us are unfamiliar with the idea of kingdom. My best education on kingdoms was probably the Netflix series *The Crown*, and even that was a bit distorted. Most of us come to this concept of kingdom, and we don't quite have a good understanding of what it is.

The interesting part about this word, *basileia*, is that the word kingdom is almost closer to a verb than a noun. Even though it is a noun, it has much to do with the reign or rule of a king, which we can grasp that. Think of the word kingdom itself. It's made up of two words, king, and then it comes from the word domain,

which is where we get the suffix “dom.” So, a kingdom is the domain of the king. Think of what my girls wrestle with all the time. A different domain—boredom. Boredom is the domain in which you’re bored. Think of fandom. If you’re a part of a fandom like the Giants fandom, you are a part of the domain in which the Giants rule and reign. Do you see how the word kingdom operates? It’s the place in which the king reigns and rules.

Dallas Willard would describe the kingdom of God as the range of God’s effective will. It’s where what God wants to be done is done. Or, to use the words of Jesus, the kingdom of God is where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. It’s the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray that the kingdom of God is where what God desires to have and be true of the world happens right here.

It Is Near

It’s not just a kingdom that’s distant. Jesus says the good news is that it’s near. This is the Greek word *eggizō*. When we think of near, we often have made this claim to be more of a chronological one, but it’s a spatial term. It means near, as in, this table is near to me. It’s available. It’s right here. The time has come. The Kingdom of God, the reign of God, has come into this particular moment.

You can contrast this with the reign of Rome going back to the time in which this was written. It is now largely a tourist trap. However, we joined millions and millions of people every single week who gather in rooms like this to continue to celebrate the kingdom of God. When Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was near, he was talking about that which was available to any and all. He says it’s right here. It’s present. You can step into it.

Our attendance here this morning testifies to the reality of the kingdom of God. God’s kingdom is continuing to go out to the ends of the earth, to Jerusalem, Judea, and all Samaria, because people like you and I have become witnesses to the reality of this kingdom. Jesus, when he began preaching the gospel says, “The time has come, the kingdom of God has come near.”

Repent And Believe The Good News

Then, there is the beautiful invitation before us all to repent and believe the good news. This statement that Jesus finished with is the availability of the kingdom of God. There are ways in which you would enter into different kingdoms, but when Jesus says to repent and believe the good news, he has extended the invitation and offer to all.

The gospel according to Jesus, the one he preached right here from Mark 1:14–15, is that the time has come, and the kingdom of God is here. It’s available to any and all who repent and believe the gospel. That’s the gospel. That’s king Jesus’s Gospel.

But how does this mesh with the overarching story? I’m guessing some of you might think that this is a little bit of a different story than what you have heard. What do you do with sin and

forgiveness and personal salvation? Where we’ve gone awry is that we’ve made salvation the gospel alone. But salvation is the cornerstone of the gospel. It’s the benefits and the effect of God being a benevolent, loving, faithful, and just king, as the scriptures say. Therefore, salvation flows from this king.

The good news is that Caesar isn’t king because Caesar isn’t forgiving. He isn’t just. He isn’t the one who can forgive sins. The good news is Jesus is king of the kingdom of God over all of creation, and he is a gracious, loving, and forgiving God. He is a God who forgives us of our sins and allows us to enter that reality. However, we have to get those two things correct. The gospel is not personal salvation, but without personal salvation, you don’t have the gospel. It comes under that umbrella. It’s the cornerstone of it.

Let me unpack the whole biblical story real quick because I think you’ll see this theme of the Kingdom of God has been throughout, from Genesis to Revelation. I hope to reset the overarching story of the scriptures.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now, when we think of heaven and earth, I want you to think of not necessarily different locations but different dimensions, different essences, or different ways of existing—heaven and earth. All of this is way more nuanced than what I can do in the next few minutes, but heaven is God’s space. It’s the existence of the kingdom of God. So it is the place where justice and redemption take place—forgiveness, beauty, and grace—that’s God’s space.

The scriptures begin by saying that he created heaven and earth. Already, you see a distinction between that line of the story that was largely about how to get to heaven and stay out of hell. That whole hell conversation is an important one because it’s a reality that Jesus talked a lot about. But it might look different. We tend to think of Genesis 1 as God created heaven and hell, and thankfully, he saved us for heaven. But it’s a different story.

In the beginning, God created heaven and earth. What is earth? human space, it’s the space where we exist. It’s filled with mountains and dirt and beauty and oceans and neighborhoods and schools and all that thing. But it’s also, as we learn quickly in the story, filled with sin and brokenness and injustice and it’s this beautiful, tragic reality that you and I exist within. But this is the story. Heaven and Earth, that’s what God created.

What’s fascinating is that in Genesis 1, these things are not separate spaces, but what is the story we read in Genesis 1 and 2? Heaven and earth overlap. These two things are together. Adam and Eve were created and lived in perfect communion with God. The way the scriptures define it is that they were naked and without shame, walking with God in the cool of the day. The original intention, right from Genesis 1, the beginning of the story, is that heaven and earth were united. That God’s presence in human space was connected. That we interacted, that they

intertwined and overlapped. The invitation was always from the very beginning.

When God created Adam and Eve what did he tell them? He said, "You are created in the image of God," which doesn't just mean like we appear like God. That's how we usually think of that, but it's actually kingly language. This is the beginning of this language of the kingdom of God to be created in the image of God, which in Genesis 1:26-28 it says they were blessed to be fruitful and multiply.

We remember that part of the command, but the second one was to subdue and rule over creation. The task of Adam and Eve was to work with God to create a beautiful world. They were placed in the garden with all these raw materials, and God said, "Let's build a world together. You are to rule over, to subdue the creation, and to rule in a way that images God." It's like we're vice-regents. God's obviously the ruler overall, but he sent us out to then extend the boundaries of Eden. It was to push back the bad and the chaos and push that out into the world and continue this beautiful heaven and earth connection.

Then Genesis 3 comes along in which Adam and Eve said, "God, that's great, but we actually want to be you. We want to rule, we want to define what that good world looks like." So in Genesis 3, what we see is that this overlap is fractured. These two things actually come apart. From there heaven and earth became this divide because Adam and Eve seized autonomy and said, "We want to rule on our behalf."

The damage that rippled out from there is the exact carnage that we watch on the news every single day. It was that sin, that brokenness, that divided those two spaces because the problem is this: heaven—God's space—is one of justice, beauty, and grace. Human space spirals quickly out of control. From Cain and Abel, to the flood, to all of this in which sin and evil ripple out. Because what happened is that humans were not created to rule alone. We were created to rule with God, but we are not God.

We, standing before that tree, just like Adam and Eve, constantly make the wrong choice. We say, "God, we know what's right for the world." So we then created this divide. It's what the scriptures say and what Steinbeck picked up on that we are now East of Eden. We were exiled out of the garden because God was protecting us from ourselves in which his space, heaven, and our space, earth, had to be separated.

So the story goes on in which over and over we're separate trying to figure this out. Genesis 3 to the end of Revelation is God's rescue attempt to reconcile the whole story. The whole story of the scriptures is trying to return heaven and earth to their union that they had in Genesis 1. That's what you see in Revelation 21 as well.

God looked at these people. He looked particularly at Abraham and said, "Abraham, I'm going to enter into a covenant with you.

From you is going to come a people called Israel and I will bless this nation, will bless this people, and through this people I will bless all the nations."

God's project with Israel was to save the entire creation through this one people. He enters into covenant, and in that covenant are the promises that we've read about all through Exodus. They end up in slavery. Then, somewhere in the wilderness there's a way in which God said, "I'm not going to abandon my people, and so I'm going to create a tabernacle."

This tabernacle was this overlap of heaven and earth in which God's space and human space would come back together. It's in that tabernacle that you could enter into the presence of God. One man. Once this high priest could enter the holy of holies and, on behalf of all the people, could offer a sacrifice. Somehow, the sacrifice and the death of one thing absorbed the sin and created room for humanity to enter into that heaven space. So, heaven and earth in the tabernacle overlapped. But that was always a temporary hold. It was never the true story.

See, they were always longing as king after king failed. The people of Israel, the prophets of old would say, there's coming one king. There's coming one king who will arrive. The time will come when they initiate the kingdom of God in which he does something and offers his own life as a way of pulling God's future, what we see in Revelation 21, back on top of the others.

This was the hope of the prophets over and over, testifying that someone would come, a Christ, a Messiah, an anointed one who will do the work that we can't do, and it would come through the line of David. David was as close as we got to that in the Old Testament. But man, did he burn out. He couldn't figure it out either. He was just a miserable mess. We needed someone beyond ourselves that would pull that future forward.

Then comes this rabbi from the north of Jerusalem who says, "The time has come, the kingdom of God is here. Repent and believe the good news." John picks up on this. John is the artist of the four gospel authors. He actually names Jesus as this tabernacle. In John 1:14, it says that Jesus came and dwelt among them. Do you want to know what the word dwelt is? It's tabernacle. The word became flesh. God became flesh and tabernacled as person.

The reason Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent human is he's the very overlap of heaven and earth. Jesus is the tabernacle. He's the overlap of heaven and earth. In heaven, we have God's presence, goodness, justice, beauty, and shalom. On the earth, we have sin, brokenness, injustice, ugliness, and broken shalom. But this Jesus, this Christ, this Messiah, he is the one pulling God's future into the present. He is now the tabernacle. This is Jesus.

Therefore, when we are in Christ, as Paul would say, we come to Jesus through the forgiveness of sins and confession, and all

through faith and allegiance to Jesus. When we are in Christ, we're in that overlap of heaven and earth. Because Jesus says that the time we've longed for is here. It is present. All of that pushes us toward our ultimate hope, which is Revelation 21 and 22. This is where we see heaven and earth back together. And in Revelation 21:3 it says,

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. Revelation 21:3

Revelation 21 is a replay of Genesis 1 and 2. It's the story brought full circle. What was once true in Genesis 1 and 2 has now progressed. But it's not a garden anymore; it's now a city. And the story isn't about how we go to heaven. It's heaven coming to earth. In Revelation 21, a little bit later, it says that he looked up and saw a new Jerusalem, a new city coming down from heaven to earth. The story has always been about the reunification of heaven and earth, which, my friends, is the gospel.

Jesus says that the future was made manifest in his presence. This is why when Jesus starts doing this work of justice, healing, miracles, and forgiveness, he's quite literally pulling from Revelation 21. He's putting it right in the midst of the here and now. The miracles of Jesus are not just some supernatural displays of his power. They are God's future being ripped from there and placed into the present because that future hope is where there is no more death, no more sickness, no more illness, no more crying, and no more mourning. It's the healing, the reconciliation of all things. That is the story that Jesus, bringing the future of justice, compassion, love, and forgiveness into the present.

The story has always been about the reunification of heaven and earth, but I'm guessing the question you're asking, which is a good one, is Jesus said it's here and now. Yet Ukraine, yet shootings, yet my spouse walked out on me, yet disease and cancer, yet failed relationships, yet my wayward child. Yet all this brokenness. But in short, it's that Jesus, when he did that moment, the shocking thing of the gospel, the arrival of Jesus, the shocking thing of the resurrection is that the future that we anticipate at the end of time was ripped into the present. And so the kingdom of God is now, and Jesus talks about it that way.

However, in other places in the gospel, he would talk about a future reality. Theologians call this the now and not yet reality of the Kingdom of God. You can feel it; you can enter into it. You have that life transformation, such as when we watched 27 people step into the waters of baptism on Easter and found that God is who he says he is. Jesus is the faithful, just, forgiving, and gracious God who forgave their sins and set their life on a new trajectory. That reality is now, yet our life is often still falling apart and broken at the seams, and we seem to return back to that sin. When will that day come?

One of the reasons is that Jesus came to establish his kingdom, not through force and coercion, but through self-giving love. Love is far more enduring than coercion. You can make people do things. The kingdoms of this world are constantly using coercion and force to push their agenda into the world, but this kingdom of God is built on the cross, Jesus' self-sacrificial love.

I look at the objective evidence as we gather with billions of people around the world attesting to that kingdom. Jesus was onto something. Love is much slower than coercion. Love is to go about and testify that we bear witness to the beauty of that gospel that heaven and earth have come and are here. Because of that, we have a different way of living. God has established a new community that's built on the kingdom of God, that future reality, not on the kingdoms of this place.

Therefore, we do things like welcome neighbors around tables. Show up at Lead Elementary school and love on kids. Proclaim the truth of Jesus, that forgiveness can be found in him. We work for justice. We work for the healing of this world because we know that this is true of the future that's breaking into this moment. All of that, my friends, is the gospel. That is the gospel. That Jesus preached that the kingdom of God is here.

Let me summarize it quickly. What is the gospel in one word, in three words, and in 30 words?

Jesus.

Jesus is king.

The gospel is the radical availability of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. Through his life, death, resurrection, and enthronement, Jesus is Lord, and the powers of sin and death defeated.

This, my friends, is the gospel that Jesus came to preach.

The way this works out is every single one of us has a kingdom. Every single one of us here has a range of effective will. Some of us have larger influences than others. When kids are young, this is part of their rebellious stage, learning the bounds of their kingdom. In many ways, it seems silly to say it, but I have a kingdom over my house. I can decorate it in the way I want to decorate it. I can eat what I want for dinner. I can watch the shows I want to watch. That's my kingdom. That's where what I want to have happen happens. We all have a range of our effective will, and the work of discipleship is learning to yield my kingdom to the kingdom of God. But we have a kingdom.

When our kingdoms clash, and they do very much clash, what do you see? Wars and rumors of wars, gossip, greed, lust, injustice, violence, hate, hurt, racism, and sexism and all sorts of things that ripple out of that because all of us are just trying to extend our kingdoms.

However, as followers of Jesus, we're a people who confess that we can't save ourselves. My kingdom will not save the problem, we identify and recognize that the problem is much deeper than

we ever anticipated. It goes much further than we ever thought, and no politician, no system of government, no economic model, nothing within humanity will ever solve this problem.

What we need is an anointed Christ. A Jesus. Someone from beyond us, the overlap of heaven and earth, to heal the thing that we know we can't. Every system that's ever existed has tried to solve this on its own and has come up short. We will never solve the problem because, as Augustine would say, "Sin is the human heart bent in on itself." And when a human heart is bent in on itself and then constructs systems, those systems are still bent inward. Over and over and over, that fallout rages around us.

So, the invitation is to repent and believe. Repentance doesn't just mean being morally fractured and guilty before God. It means that, at times, you'll be very emotionally moved by the reality of the way your kingdom contrasts with the kingdom of God, and that will push you towards repentance. But at its core, repentance means to rethink everything. The word is metanoia and it literally means to think different.

The gospel is the good news event about something that took place in which the whole world is different, and the proper response to that is that we rethink everything about our lives in light of that reality and then believe the good news.

This word doesn't just mean to intellectually accept that reality. It means to place our allegiance and our faith in that person. So to repent and believe the good news means that I rethink everything about what I understood about the world. I then place my allegiance—not in other kingdoms, not in myself, not in President Trump, or President Biden or whoever and whatever it is, but in Jesus.

The gospel says to repent and believe that we need something beyond ourselves to save us. And that something is Jesus. The gospel is the kingdom of God arriving. I just wonder if some of you are being invited into that new reality.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No.1491-1FC