

The Everlasting Gospel

Memory Text: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’”

(Jeremiah 31:3)

Illustration/Setting The Stage: Good news. Everyone loves good news. Visited the dentist the other day. There were no cavities. Good news! You’ve been concerned about your family member ever since you heard they lost their job. You get a phone call telling you they found another one. Good news! A typhoon was barreling toward the Philippines and you were waiting for good news from family who live there. When we consider the racial tensions, astronomical national debt, government corruption, celebrity rape allegations, international instability, Ebola scares, etc., we live in a bad news world. And we sit on the edge of our seat waiting for good news.

Studies have shown that the ratio of bad news to good news on mainstream media outlets is around 17:1. That means that 95% is negative. This is a massive number, and I’m sure if you stop to think for a moment about the most recent news you watched, it has also been overwhelmingly negative.

God offers good news to us today. It’s called the gospel. “Gospel” comes from the old English word “godspel”, meaning “good news”. In the New Testament, “gospel” translates as “euangelion” (from which we get “evangel”), which also means “good news”. An evangelist is a person who spends his career preaching the good news about Jesus.

The Bible speaks of the “glorious” gospel (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11). And rightly so. But only in Revelation 14:6 is the word “everlasting” used in conjunction with the

gospel. There is only one gospel that saves men and it will continue as long as there are men to be saved. There has only ever been one gospel and there never will be another gospel.

We'll talk about the "eternal gospel" and answer the basic questions surrounding salvation by faith. By closing the quarter with a look at how the gospel is presented in the Bible, we can better see how James fits this larger picture of God's plan of salvation.

Sunday – The Gospel in the Old Testament

Hebrews 4:2; Titus 2:11; 1 Corinthians 10:4

Read Hebrews 4:2. "Gospel" – the good news was preached to ancient Israel. How? Through type, ceremony, sacrifice, and ritual. It was the same gospel. Unless the preaching is met with faith on the part of the hearers it won't benefit him. Perhaps the problem isn't the preacher after all!

Jesus knew this all too well (see Matt. 7:24-27). When Noah was told a flood was coming, how did he respond? He built a boat. Was faith mixed into his hearing? When Moses heard God tell him to go forward at the Red Sea, what did he do? He went forward despite the apparent ridiculousness of the proposition. Was faith mixed into his hearing?

This text is one of many in the Bible that affirms that God's plan to save people has never changed. A person living in the OT wasn't saved by keeping the law. That person needed to be saved through the gospel by faith just like we do today. A person living in the OT wasn't living under the dispensation of law. It was a dispensation of grace just like ours today.

Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."

1 Corinthians 10:4: “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”

Then there’s Isaiah’s description of the Messiah (“By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” Isa. 53:11); the prayer of David (Ps. 51); and Ezekiel’s appeal to receive a new heart (Ezek. 36:25-27).

Did you know Adventist’s believe in 3 times more grace than a dispensationalist (someone who believes people are saved a different way in the old and new testament era’s). Dispensationalists believe in 2,000 years of God’s grace. Adventist’s believe in 6,000 years of grace! And it’s a grace that pardon’s sin and provides power to overcome it.

Monday – The Gospel Made Flesh

Matthew 5:20; John 3:3, 5

Read Matthew 5:20. Jesus standard of righteousness was far higher and deeper than the Pharisees righteousness of that time. But how could that be? The religious leaders were meticulous Sabbath keepers and tithe payers. They kept themselves from unclean foods and made the necessary offerings at the temple. How could a person get any more righteous than that?

It was if the disciples were in the little league and were told that the least they must do is beat the San Francisco Giants in the World Series; or that they being sprinters in elementary school had to run faster than Usain Bolt or Florence Griffith-Joyner in the 100m. How would that be possible? The following verses give us a clue.

Matthew 3:1, 2: “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” (cp. Luke 3:7-14)

John 3:3, 5: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’”

Romans 10:3: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

The religious leaders of Jesus day had a righteousness that consisted in external compliance to the letter of the law. They taught that a man is judged by a majority of his deeds. So if the good deeds outnumbered the bad ones you were considered righteous. To compensate for any wrong behavior they implemented a merit system that they believed was their passport to heaven. But Jesus taught that any effort to attain to righteousness through religiosity is less than worthless. What they needed was righteousness from outside themselves. They needed a change of heart.

Jesus’ teachings went all the way to the heart (murder is to hate, adultery is to lust). He showed that righteousness by works could not save us, only righteousness by faith in His word. He also taught that God is the great initiator of salvation (see Luke 15), and that God justifies the contrite not the proud (Luke 18:9-17).

Tuesday – The Gospel in Paul

Romans 1:16, 17; 3:24-26

We now get to spend 10 minutes talking about the gospel according to Paul; a topic that has been debated and argued in myriads of volumes for several hundred years. The key, however, to understanding Paul’s theology is in recognizing the key events in his life that shaped it – seeing Jesus personally (see Acts 22:2-8) and through the scriptures (Rom. 1:1, 2). See also 1 Tim. 1:12-15 and Gal. 2:20 to find out how Paul was impacted by the gospel.

Read 2 Cor. 3:14-16. Paul had been commissioned a minister of the new covenant, but his ministry for the Jews in his day was no more effective than Moses in his time. The Jews lacked the capacity to see the great spiritual truths in their ceremonies and sacrifices. To them, the “letter of the law” was glorious, but it had veiled their eyes from understanding the “spirit of the law”. The veil was over the writings of Moses which kept them from seeing Christ. This had more to do with their will than their intellect. They were willfully blind. They didn’t want to accept this type of Messiah. Only the discovery of Christ in the OT would have lifted the veil from the reading of the scriptures.

How did Paul define the gospel?

Romans 1:16, 17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” The power of God to save all who believe.

Romans 3:24-26: “Being justified [cleared of guilt and cleansed by grace] freely by His grace through the redemption [God has bought us back by paying for our sins] that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *as* a propitiation [reconciler] by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins [remission, or forgiveness] that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This is the heart of the gospel in the book of Romans.

Wednesday – The “New” Covenant

Hebrews 10:16

Read Hebrews 8:6-13. “Covenant” – an agreement between two parties based on mutual promises. Why did God establish the old covenant if it was imperfect?

There was nothing wrong with the covenant. The problem was with the people (v. 8 – “all that the Lord has said we will do” – Ex. 19:8). For an explanation of the two covenants read *Patriarchs & Prophets*, pp. 370-372.

Thursday – The Climax of the Gospel

Revelation 14:6, 12; 12:17

Read Rev. 10:7 (cp. Rom. 3:21). Next to Rev. 14:6, this verse is the only other verse in Revelation that specifically refers to the preaching of the gospel. The word “preached” comes from the Greek word “euangelizo” which means to “proclaim the good news.” Adventists find their calling and commission in these two verses.

The gospel from Genesis to Revelation is the same. The law is the same. So is the covenant. Jesus, Paul, and James all affirm that the gospel is the same one believed by Abraham (John 8:56; Rom. 4:13; James 2:21-23). The gospel embraces both pardon from sin and power to overcome it.

Read Rev. 14:12 & 12:17. Why are these references, in the context of the everlasting gospel, so significant? They reveal the goal of the gospel - perfect obedience to the law of God. The reason we plant seed is so we can enjoy the fruit. Jesus came, lived, died, rose again in order that He might restore humanity in the image of God – a people who genuinely love and obey God. Disobedience forfeited immortality. God’s plan of salvation is to restore humanity and bring us back to what we were before the fall.

And this demonstration of obedience is done in the face of stiff opposition and under the most trying circumstances this world has ever seen (see Rev. 13:11-8; 14:8-11). That this can happen is evidence of a completely transformed life.

Appeal: Every second of our lives, God is exerting all His power, grace, and mercy to reconcile us to His great heart of love. Won't you keep responding to that work each day?