
THE CENTRE OF OUR FAITH

Can we ever hear the Gospel too many times?

Ephesians 2:4-9

To answer this question, we first need to look at this word: gospel. It is a very important word, so much so that the Christian faith completely hangs on it. But it is also a word that would be in the dictionary of Christianese. So, let's make sure we are all on the same page. The Bible Project explain it in a really understandable way:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41M013X3A&t=74s>

The gospel is the good news of God's kingdom. It is the royal announcement that Jesus is Lord of the world, the true king of creation. Jesus rose from the dead as the true king, whose love is stronger than death. All authority in heaven and earth now belongs to him.

What was your response to this video? "Was it yea, yea, yea I have heard this before, teach me something I don't know"? Or "wow I needed that reminder of what Jesus did for me"?

The challenge is that we often see the gospel as something that we share with people who have not yet heard or responded to it. Then from there, after accepting the good news, we hopefully grow in Christian maturity. This is not actually a very biblical understanding. I want to suggest that Jesus and what he has done for us is not something we come to and then move on from. The gospel is not just for lost people, it is also for Christians. In their book *Grounded in the Gospel*, J.I. Packer and Gary Parrett state: "We never move on from the Gospel; we move on in the Gospel."

The good news needs to be central to our faith.

This is what the big story of the Bible shows us. Genesis to Revelation is one overarching story of God's great love and saving grace towards sinners in Jesus Christ. The whole story points towards, and back to Jesus. Let's take a look:

In Genesis we see that God created the world and it was good, that he created human kind to be in relationship with Him and were made to reflect who God is to the rest of creation. But instead of trusting and obeying God's instructions Adam and Eve were deceived, causing brokenness and separation between humanity and God, and between each other.

The rest of the Old Testament shows us how God does not give up on humanity but instead starts his plan of redemption. It also shows how sin runs deep and no matter how much mankind tries they cannot be in right standing

with God because of their sinful inclination towards selfishness.

The New Testament begins with God himself becoming flesh and bringing with him a new kingdom. Through Jesus' life people see a new kind of kingdom, one of healing, restoration, forgiveness, provision and so much more. Jesus then paid the price for sin by dying in the place of all humanity so that we could be reconciled to God. Rising from the dead he defeated death and the power of sin. The rest of the New Testament explains what this means for us and invites us in to the kingdom of God and a new way of living. Revelation shows us the end of the story, that those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord will reign with him forever.

What is the danger of forgetting or becoming numb to the gospel?

I am grateful for growing up in the Christian family I did. And thankfully I didn't really go through a "rebellious" stage or anything but for quite a few years I was just trying to live a 'good' life. I knew to be kind to people because that's what Christians do. I knew the good news that Jesus died for my sins that separated me from God, but I didn't really think that I had sinned all that much. That is the problem. -In the worlds eyes I was a "good" person did I really need a saviour?

The thing is we have such a limited understanding of what sin is. It is so much bigger than keeping a list of moral standards. The real meaning of sin is to fail, or miss the goal. But what's the goal? To love God and others by treating them with the honour that they deserve. If this is the case, sin is a failure to love God and others by not treating them with the honour that they deserve.

Jesus knew this condition of humanity so when he came across the woman caught in adultery he said to the crowd "let he who has not sinned cast the first stone." (John 8:1-11) In Romans 7 we see Paul having this wrestle with himself. "I do the things I don't want to do and I don't do the things I want to do" and he shares about the sinful nature within him.

A Distorted Faith

Here is one example of a distorted faith: In the book *Soul Searching* authors Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, explain a counterfeit Christianity called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" (MTD) It believes that God is a cosmic therapist and divine butler, ready to help us out when



needed. God exists but really isn't a part of our lives. We are supposed to be "good people," but each person must find what's right for him or her. The counterfeit claims good people will go to heaven, and we shouldn't be stifled by organized religion where somebody tells us what we should do or what we should believe.

You may hear this and go "no way do I see my faith like this". The thing is some of the MTD beliefs can easily sneak their way into our thinking when the true gospel is not at the center.

MTD runs counter to the gospel of Jesus Christ in every way. We are not saved by earning our way up the good-works ladder, nor is God the divine genie dispensing wishes at command. He's not a distant "clock-maker," sitting back to watch it all play out. He is Immanuel -who became man to seek and save the lost. The gospel says that Jesus has accomplished for you—through his life, death, and resurrection—everything that God has required of you; thereby, securing eternal life for all God's people, and received by faith alone.

Pride

One of the dangers of becoming numb to the gospel is that pride sneaks in. If we move on from the good news that while we were still sinners Christ died for us, our faith can move from relationship with our Creator to a performance-based faith. Romans 3:22-24 is a good scripture to hold on to in regards to this.

Following Christ is a life time journey how do we keep the Good News at the center of our faith?

Some of you have had years of practicing this, and will have great tips. I would love to hear how you keep the good news at the core of your life.

Confession is an important way we can keep Christ at the center, here is one of my favorite quotes about confession: *"Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We feel like everyone has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. We imagine that we are the only ones who have not stepped onto the highway of heaven. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy. But if we know that the people of God are first a fellowship of sinners, we are freed to hear the unconditional call of God's love and confess our needs openly before our brothers and sisters. We know that we are not alone in our sin. The fear and pride that clings to us like barnacles cling to others also. We are sinners*

together. In acts of mutual confession, we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed."

– Celebration of Discipline Richard J. Foster page 145-146

How we practicing forgiveness towards each other is crucial. Do we ask each other for forgiveness and forgive?

Spiritual discipline called Prayer of Examen. How have I revealed the good news today? Where have I misrepresented the good news today?

Baptism and Communion are practices that bring us back to the cross.

Today marks the start of mission month. We as a church have a mission field right here in Invercargill, a city who need to hear and experience the Good News of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom.

How are we sharing and revealing the good news to a watching world?

Do how we live our lives personally and as a community of Christ's disciples look like good news to our neighbors and community?

I want to finish with a quote from the Bible Project video we watched at the start: "But something amazing happens when people tell the story of Jesus and start living like he really is king of the world."

Download or listen to this message at:

www.icbc.org.nz

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. Share how you first encountered the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ.
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-10 together. Ask each person to share what stood out to them and why.
3. Lizzie mentioned a few dangers of becoming numb to the gospel, what one stood out to you and can you think of anymore examples?
4. Discuss some ways to move on **in** the Gospel instead of moving on **from** the Gospel.
5. Discuss the quote from Richard Foster's book Celebration of Discipline about confession.
6. How are we individually, and as a church, revealing the good news of Jesus to the world around us? How can we do better?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS