

John 3:16

“What is the Gospel” – Preaching about the importance of the Resurrection

Good Morning Saints. (pause) Good Morning Sinners! (pause) (depending on response; repeat)

Sisters and brothers a terrible reality has come to my attention recently. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about this situation. There are people who call themselves Christians who can no longer identify what is the Gospel. They do not know what is the Good News. So this morning I aim to do three things.

- A) Explain what the Gospel is not.
- B) Explain what is the Gospel.
- C) Explain why death and resurrection are such good news.

A.1. Not all Scripture is the Gospel. The Bible is filled with a lot of different kinds of writing and literature. Not all of that Scripture has the same specific purpose. All of Scripture is fit for teaching, preaching and correction. All of Scripture tells God’s story for God’s people; (pause) but not all of Scripture is good news. The Bible is filled with law, and history; poetry and songs, witness, testimony, apocalyptic literature, and of course Gospel Narrative. The Bible is a lot of things, but not all of it is good news to all people.

2. The first five books of the Bible are what we call the Pentateuch or the Law of Moses. In those chapters there are laws about which animals are good for eating and which ones are not. There are laws about festivals and seasons. There are laws about what is right and what is wrong before the eyes of God. These laws are important because it is hard to know how to do right if we don’t know how we have done wrong. (pause) I am willing to bet money that everybody in this room has broken some if not many of the laws written about in the Law of Moses. Let’s find out.

By a show of hands, how many people in this room like football? (pause) How many of y’all have ever thrown a football, the old pig skin around in the back yard? (pause) The Carolina’s are BBQ country. How many of y’all like or have eaten pork BBQ? (pause) Congratulations. We’re all sinners. Deuteronomy 14:8 **“And the swine, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcass you shall not touch.”**

What about this? How many of you wear clothes made from two different materials? (pause) Is there a man or woman in this room who is wearing a shirt or dress that is not a combination of cotton and polyester, or some other combination? (pause) Guess what. We’re all sinners. Leviticus 19:19 **“Nor shall there come upon you a garment made of two different kinds of stuff.”**

3. Certainly there are some sins which are worse than others. However, we should take care of trying to decide which sins are more grievous or damaging than others. That is God’s job and not ours.

The Rev. Billy Graham put it this way. “It is always difficult and dangerous to attempt to list sins according to their degree or seriousness. In one sense, all sins are equal in that they all separate us from God. The Bible’s statement, **“For the wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23) applies to all sin, whether in thought or word.”<sup>1</sup>

As the Apostle Peter discovered the hard way in Acts 10:34, **“God shows no partiality to men.”** We were created to serve God. God did not create humanity so God could serve us. (pause) Just because we think one

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<sup>1</sup> www.billygraham.org

law is more important than another it does not mean that law is as important to God as we think it should be. This is the work of the Law – to remind us who serves who, and why? Which is also why the Law is not the Gospel.

4. None of the whole of the Old Testament is the Gospel. The Old Testament bears witness to the hope of Christ's coming and resurrection. The Old Testament lays the ground work for what the world will not look like when Christ comes in final victory, but the Old Testament is not the good news. In many ways the Old Testament bears witness to what the Gospel is not.

5. Neither are any of the epistles; or letters of the New Testament the Gospel. They bear witness to and offer testimony about what the Gospel has done, but they are not the Gospel. The Acts of the Apostles is not the Gospel. It bears witness to the spread of the Gospel but it is not the Gospel. Paul's letters to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, Timothy, Titus and Philemon offer instruction, teaching and testimony about the Gospel, but they are not the Gospel. The letter to the Hebrews helps us to connect what God has done in the Old Testament with what God has done through Jesus Christ, but the Letter to the Hebrews is not the Gospel. The letters from James, and Peter offer helpful instruction for how to live our lives in response to the Gospel. John's Revelation gives hope through the Gospel to those who are oppressed, but these are not the Gospel.

B.1 The Gospel is this, and if it sounds familiar please respond appropriately. "Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. **In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.**"

2. When Christ died on the cross Jesus paid the price for all of the different and imaginative ways we broke the Law God handed down to Moses. Our God is a God of justice. Justice is about balance and the price had to be paid for the debt of sin we have all wracked up. Please try to remember the day you gave your life to Christ. **(pause)** Please try to remember the change you felt over your life, and the joy you experienced in your heart. The sin and the guilt, and the shame are gone. When by faith we have accepted Jesus Christ through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit we experience peace which passes all understanding. We are wrapped in joy beyond measure. The moment of justification is truly a beautiful thing, and it should be shared with everyone.

3. However, the Good News does not stop at Justification. The Gospel does not end with our sins being forgiven. The Gospel goes on because Christ did not stay in the grave. The full message of the Gospel is Jesus Christ rose again. Jesus loves us enough to die for us and God loves us enough to raise Christ from the dead so we might rise with Christ. When we rise with Christ from the ashes of our former mistakes we have the opportunity and the power through the Holy Spirit to become more like Christ by leaving the temptations, the chains, and all of the pulls that would cause us to sin behind. That's part of why the Gospel is good news. The Gospel keeps going. The Gospel empowers us to become more like Christ. The Gospel creates that opportunity to live into God's goodness and joy and grace to explore just how deep into God's love the rabbit hole goes. If only more of us would become addicted to God's grace, God's love and God's goodness that the Gospel fires would start anew, and recover our country in a rabid brush fire of God's grace.

4. My brothers and sisters the Gospel is about God's love; **(pause)** Jesus' sacrifice, death and resurrection, **(pause)** and the power of the Holy Spirit made possible by Jesus' victory over death. That is the Gospel.

C. So, here is why the Gospel is so important. First an observation and second a modern story.

1. The Pharisees were the right wing, fundamentalist conservatives of their day. They believed every Jew, and I mean every Jew should follow all 644 commandments of the Old Testament. They were afraid God would scatter the Jews again if they did not follow God's commandments to the letter – down to the dotted "i's," and the crossed, "t's." The Apostle Paul was one of, if not the most zealous Pharisee of his day and he even took to the streets to persecute those followers of the way of Jesus Christ who dared to break the Law of Moses for the sake of Jesus Christ.

2. The Sadducees were the theologically liberal people of their time. They did not believe in the resurrection, and they were more politically motivated. The Pharisees and the Sadducees did not agree on anything most of the time.

3. However, there was one thing they did agree on. They were all standing together in the Praetorium when Pilate asked shall I set this man Jesus free? (pause) Instead, the Pharisees and the Sadducees shouted together, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" They agreed. They were bound together in their agreement about Jesus' condemnation and death. (pause) And Jesus was crucified. (pause) The Pharisees and Sadducees together had won. (pause) And Jesus did die. (pause)

4. Sisters and brothers. Did Jesus stay dead? (pause) Did Jesus stay dead?! (pause) What happened to Jesus? (pause) Who had the greater victory?! (pause) Who had the greater victory? (pause) When we allow politics to divide us; when we are separated by these indivisible differences we are not standing on the rock of Christ Jesus. We are standing on our preferences and opinions. And as the Apostle Peter learned the hard way, "God offers no partiality toward men" (Acts 10:34). Or as you may have heard this verse interpreted, "God is no respecter of men."

5. In my second appointment one of the two churches I served hated my guts before we even got out of the moving truck. We were moving with two week old Audrey, and had dared to ask for some energy saving improvements to the parsonage so we could afford to live there on entry level local pastor salary. It was not a good start. There was a group of strong willed women in the church who had transitioned from positive, life affirming leaders of the church into bullies who squashed ministry and complained about everybody.

That fall we began Disciple I Bible study. None of the church bullies participated. Twelve people started the study. Ten stayed with it until the end. Disciple is a long study; 34 weeks; 17 in the Old Testament and 17 in the New Testament. Those that stayed formed a strong bond together, and their focus began to shift. They were no longer interested in going to church because they always had. Now they wanted to see what God was going to do next for their church.

By the next year the other church on the charge had elected to close, and a new church was added. We started Disciple II that year with a mixture of people from both churches. The two churches grew together and learned A LOT from one another. They learned so much that the church took a stand against their church bullies. They told their long time friends and former mentors, "We love you, but this has to stop." The bullies left. The church shrank a bit. However, new life had already started growing in the church. The Holy Spirit was moving. The church started serving the poor and working poor in their community. The church started holding monthly dinners to raise money to keep their church open.

This church has not only survived, but has become fruitful for the Kingdom of God because they found the courage to allow a bullying relationship to die so they could be resurrected in the upward call of Christ. After I was reappointed the bullies came back. They tried to start up their old bullying ways, and without me the church looked at them and said, "We love you. We are glad you are back, but that behavior cannot start again." You see brothers and sisters it wasn't me who saved that church, or brought a turn around. It was

Jesus Christ. No pastor can save a church. The church has to choose to follow Christ. All the pastor can do is their best to point in the right direction, and get out of the way. The Holy Spirit works to move a congregation to remember what it is to search Scripture and to listen for God's calling. All of this is possible because of the life giving work of the Holy Spirit. But for a resurrection of the Spirit to happen so that we might be raised with Christ something has to die. For the church in this story it was bullying behavior and a belief things had to operate their way. That behavior had become a sacred cow of their church, and that behavior had to die. Church what are the sacred cows in our church? **(pause)** What are the traditions and favored opinions we are certain have to be Gospel and aren't? Sisters and brothers I believe the Holy Spirit is winding up to do something incredible in and through this church. The only question left to ask is are we, the body of Christ, gearing up to say, "No," to the Holy Spirit? Or are we willing to allow some of our sacred cows to die so we might rejoice in the resurrection of the Holy Spirit in this place?

In the Name of Jesus Christ,  
Amen