

What is the Gospel?

Addressing a Misunderstanding about the Good News

Thesis: We are a people who want to grow in our capacity, skill, and desire to reach others with the love of God.

Text: John 1:1-42; Acts 26:12–18; 1 John 5:21; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Here is what I believe to be the word of the Lord for us in 2025. It is the same word which God gave to us for 2024.

Convergence: reaching people with the love of God.

Here is our group identity.

We are a people who want to grow in our capacity, skill, and desire to reach others with the love of God.

Here is what I believe:

1. Reaching others with the love of God is **still** what the Lord is doing.
2. Reaching others with the love of God is **still** where we need to grow as a congregation.
3. **Jesus is reaching others and asking them to join his church in general and Calvary in particular** (Matthew 16:18).
 - a. **Are we joining Jesus in his mission?**
 - b. We need to be inspired and challenged to practice more.
 - c. We need to celebrate progress.
 - d. And, we need to grow in our capacity to join Jesus on this mission.

On the mission trip to Nigeria and the Global Prayerquake for Jan. 3 – 12, the Lord led me to a divine appointment with Evangelist Miracle Chris. I believe that conversation speaks into our word for the year.

1. **Spiritual warfare.**
 - a. **Evangelism is not just about scattering the seed.**
 - i. Yes, we pray for the seed to take root and bear fruit.

- ii. Yes, we are a “servant and witness to the things which you have seen in me.”
- b. **Evangelism involves warfare.**
 - i. *To open their eyes.* That requires revelation and warfare.
 - ii. *To help them turn from darkness to light.* That requires light and warfare.
 - iii. *To help the turn from power of Satan to God.* That requires a power encounter of warfare. Someone has to win the battle for their lives in the spirit realm.
 - iv. *Acts 26:12–18 (ESV) In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes [remove the blinders; free them from bondage; level the playing field], (1) so that they may turn from darkness to light and (2) from the power of Satan to God, (3) that they may receive forgiveness of sins and (4) a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*
- c. We spent time looking at the issue of spiritual warfare during several messages from February 2 through March 23.

2. Idols.

- a. Evangelism also means dealing with idols according to Miracle Chris.
- b. He was talking about the idols in the evangelist.
 - i. Idol of misunderstanding what the gospel is.
 - ii. Idol of expectation on what needs to happen for the person to get saved or to come into a personal relationship with God.
 - iii. Idol of expectation of what harvest looks like and how it comes.
 - iv. Idol of expectation in how to reach each person.
- c. We all have expectations and assumptions that the Lord wants to highlight and correct.
- d. *Dear children, keep yourselves from idols (1 John 5:21).*
 - i. **Reject that which is false and embrace that which is real.**

- ii. Applying this text for today, Dodd gives the following exhortation: “It behooves the individual Christian to be on his guard against any such God-substitute, whether it be a political idea, or some fashionable cult, or merely the product of his own ‘wishful thinking.’” (Akin, Daniel L. 1, 2, 3 *John*. Vol. 38. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.)
- iii. It is easy to adopt expectations and assumptions that are out of alignment with the way of Jesus and the kingdom of God.
- e. **Action: Today, we are going to start considering some obstacles, assumptions, and idols that hinder our ability to reach others with the love of God.**

3. Power ministry and evangelism.

- a. At the MPN Global Prayerquake, I was also reminded of our calling as a church to move in the power of the Holy Spirit in ministry, evangelism, and warfare.
- b. In 1988, the Lord carved out time in our services for God to touch people with his presence and power. Since 1989, we have trained people through [Ministry Team Training](#) how to do the works of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit and out of intimacy with the Living God.
- c. **The truth is that we leak. We leak of faith, belief, conviction, and practice because we live in an anti-supernatural culture and worldview.**
- d. *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but [so that your faith may rest] on God’s power (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).*
- e. May each of us recommit to doing the works of Jesus and sharing the words of the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- f. May we both proclaim and demonstration the gospel of the kingdom of God in our spheres of influence.
- g. **Action:** Sign up for [Ministry Team Training](#) each time it is offered. The remaining sessions for this year are scheduled for July 26 and Oct. 18.

What are some obstacles and idols that hinder us from reaching others with the love of God? Today, let's talk about what the gospel is, and let's address a misunderstanding about the good news.

Misunderstanding what the gospel is. (Consider [this resource](#) from Tim Mackie and other resources from [The Bible Project](#).)

1. **What is the gospel in the mind of most Christians?** (See graphic.)
 - a. Most people believe that the gospel is about what happened in Genesis 3 with the fall of mankind and this world.
 - i. We sinned against God.
 - ii. We believed a lie about who God is and who we are.
 - iii. Our sin separates us from God.
 - b. Most people think that the gospel is living good lives so that we go to heaven and so that we don't go to hell.
 - c. This idea is a caricature and misunderstanding of the good news. It is not a compelling story.
 - i. It is "me" centric rather than God-centered.
 - ii. It sees our lives as a choice between two paths (right / wrong, heaven / hell) rather than a call to relationship and partnership with the Living God.
 - iii. It focuses mostly on sin management and doing what we can do.
2. **What is the gospel according to Scripture?**
 - a. *Mark 1:1–3 (NIV84) 1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*"
 - i. The good news is focused and centered on Jesus; it is relational.
 - ii. Declaring good news is about preparing and sharing the way of the Lord into our lives and spheres of influence.
 - iii. The good news is about what God has done, is doing, and will do through Jesus Christ his Son.
 - iv. The good news revolves around God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit; it is relationally based.
 - v. The good news about Jesus links you up to a story that is already in action, like a river that is already flowing.
 - vi. This story is not simple; the Bible is not simple.
 1. We mess up when we attempt to boil the Bible down to half-truths and summaries.

2. We have to humble ourselves, admit that we could be wrong, and come back and rediscover what the Bible is actually trying to tell us.

vii. **What does the Bible say in Mark 1:2-3?**

1. The Bible says that Jesus comes as the fulfillment of Israel's story and as the fulfillment to the promise God made.
2. God said he would come, visit, and rescue his people.
- b. *Mark 1:14–15 (NIV84) 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*
 - i. What is the good news that Jesus told us to repent and believe?
 1. The time has come.
 2. Something is here now. What has come here now is the kingdom of God.
 3. The good news in the mind of Jesus and according to the Bible is not about us going somewhere.
 - a. **Rather, the good news according to Jesus and the Bible is God coming here.**
 - b. The good news according to Jesus is about something God is doing here.
 - ii. The good news God is about the kingdom of God. There is a kingdom. There is a king. There is a realm and a people in whom and through whom where the will of God is done.
 - iii. The good news requires a response: repent and believe the good news of the kingdom of God.
 - iv. The good news from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22 involves God putting heaven and earth together.
 1. In Genesis 1 and 2, God invited us into that original work.
 2. Now, we are invited to join God in a restoration process.

3. **Observations about the gospel of the kingdom of God.**

- a. **The intent, design, and desire of God is to put heaven and earth together.**
- b. The gospel is not to get people to heaven.
- c. The gospel is not just getting sinners "saved" from hell.
- d. The gospel gets the hell out of this world.
- e. The gospel gets the hell out of us.
 - i. Note: God will not violate a person's choice. He respects someone's choice.

- ii. When he puts heaven and earth together, hell is put outside the city.
 - f. The gospel is not about our power, safety, prosperity, or comfort.
- 4. **We have a compelling message.**
 - a. We want to cultivate something inside of us so that we love God and, because we love God, we want to talk about Jesus.
 - b. Remember this truth. **We talk about what we love and are excited about.**
 - i. It is not weird to talk about something you love.
 - ii. You will talk about something that challenges you, inspires you, and fascinates you.
 - iii. If you don't talk about Jesus, spend time reflecting on what that is about.
 - c. We pray and ask the Lord for divine opportunities and chances to share our love for Jesus with others.
 - d. We start by asking people questions and listening to what they say.
 - i. Find out what they think about Jesus.
 - ii. When you hear what they share, you will say, "Wow, I don't believe in that Jesus either. The Jesus you have rejected is not the Jesus I follow."
 - e. We love people and treat them with respect.
 - i. If they ask us not to talk about Jesus all the time, we honor their request and respect them.
 - 1. We won't force the conversation.
 - 2. We will pray and trust God for the right timing.
 - 3. We know that the Holy Spirit will give us a chance to share at some point.
 - ii. We won't badger people.
 - iii. Over time, as we love and honor people, the conversation will happen.
 - f. As we have opportunity, we share who Jesus is and our story in following Jesus.
- 5. **There is a big misunderstanding about who Jesus is and what the gospel is.**
(See graphic.)
 - a. The story most people believe.
 - i. We are all born on this planet.
 - ii. We live our lives. There are times of joy and times of sadness. We all have similar experiences and stories.
 - iii. Your friends think that you believe that you are trying to do good. Sometimes we fail. Sometimes we do poorly. Sometimes we get it right.
 - iv. At the end of the story, God closes the door on history.

1. Based on how good you have been or how bad you have been, or, based on whether or not you have held onto correct ideas and beliefs about Jesus, your destiny is one of two places. One place is heaven; the other is hell.
 2. It is a disembodied existence: one is a good place and one is a bad place where God punishes you for all eternity.
- b. **This story is wrong.**
- i. The Bible teaches us something different.
 - ii. And, the actual life and teachings of Jesus makes it untrue.
- c. **What is wrong with the story most people believe or think Christians believe?**
- i. It is a “me” centered story rather than a God-centered story.
 1. It is about what I am doing either good or bad.
 2. Or, it is about what we believe and if we believe the right things or not.
 - ii. The good news is the story about what God is doing in our world. It is about what God is doing in our world through Jesus.
 - iii. The good news is that God’s kingdom, his rule and his reign, has arrived in our world in the person of Jesus.
 - iv. The good news is that Jesus is here to address a problem. That is revealed in the rest of the pages of the gospel of Mark.
- d. **The union of heaven and earth is what the Bible is all about.**
- i. The story of the Bible starts in Genesis 1, not in Genesis 3.
 - ii. God lived with and walked with humans on the earth in Genesis 1 and 2. Heaven and earth were completely united together.
 - iii. God and humanity lived together with no separation.
 - iv. Humanity partnered with God in building the world that God wanted.
 - v. There was no separation.
 - vi. Then, we decided to go our own way, to build our own world apart from God, and we separated earth from heaven.
 - vii. God’s place is full of his presence, goodness, justice, and beauty.
 - viii. Humanity’s place is full of sin, wickedness, injustice, and ugliness.
 - ix. Jesus comes as the tabernacle of God, the place where heaven and earth overlap, because he is God incarnate, God in the flesh.
 - x. Jesus came and brought heaven to earth. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And, Jesus taught his followers to pray,

"Your kingdom come, your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

- xi. Jesus came as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- xii. The cross is the place where Jesus absorbs sin in order to create a clean space that is not limited like the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament. The sacrifice of Jesus has the power to keep spreading and spreading to reunite more and more heaven and earth.

e. Here is a good question. What happens when I die?

- i. In the New Testament, the Bible teaches us that when a follower of Jesus dies, we go to be with Jesus in heaven.
- ii. But, that is not the focus of the Bible story.
- iii. The focus of the Bible is on how heaven and earth are being reunited in Jesus. Heaven and earth will get completely united one day when Jesus returns.
- iv. In Revelation, we have a beautiful image of the Garden of Eden coming as a beautiful city. The New Jerusalem comes to end the age of sin and death by redeeming all of human history in a renewed creation.
- v. God's space and human space completely overlap once again.

6. The story of the Bible is the unified story of Jesus.

- a. The Bible tells the story of how heaven and earth got ripped apart, which was not God's will.
- b. God wants to partner with us and rule his good world together with humanity.
- c. Something went wrong inside of us.
 - i. We said we will decide what is good and evil.
 - ii. We decided not to trust God's definition of good and evil.
 - iii. We said that we will build our own kingdom and do our own will.
- d. In the beginning, God made heaven and earth.
 - i. The Bible does not say that God made heaven, earth, and hell.
 - ii. Whatever hell is, God didn't make it. Humans did.
 - iii. God made heaven and earth, and it is very good.
 - iv. Whatever hell is, it came into the world later (evil, sin) by our decisions.
- e. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote about the power of the tongue:
 - i. *James 3:5-6 (LEB) 5 So also the tongue is a small member of the body and boasts great things. Behold how small a fire sets ablaze how great a forest! 6 And the tongue is a fire! The world of unrighteousness, the tongue, is set among our members,*

defiling the whole body and setting on fire the course of human existence, being set on fire by hell.

- ii. The human tongue has the power to bless and praise God the creator.
- iii. At the same time, the human tongue has the power to gossip about people, to tear down their character, and to speak ill and poorly of others.
 - 1. James says that when humans do that with their tongues, their tongues are lit on fire by hell.
 - 2. The implication is that hell is a reality that is present now.
 - 3. Hell is something that humans unleash on each other and on God's good world. We do it to ruin and destroy relationships and people.
 - 4. Hell is something that we created on earth. Hell is what humans unleash on earth.
 - 5. God hates hell and wants to get the hell out of earth. God hates the breaking down and defiling of image bearing human beings.
- f. The good news of the Bible is that God loves his good world, and he loves the human beings whom he created in his image.
 - i. Heaven is here in Jesus to invade earth and to confront evil.
 - ii. In the book of Mark, you see Jesus confronting hell and its disastrous effects on human beings.
 - iii. Jesus casts personal evil out of people.
 - iv. Jesus deals with the breakdown of human relationships.
 - v. The book of Matthew tells us that Jesus hates hell and what it does to human beings. Jesus hates the path which leads human beings down.
 - vi. Illustration: We can all agree that sexual abuse of children for money is wrong. It is a hell-fire plague on earth.
 - 1. We want to get rid of sex trafficking.
 - 2. Jesus hates sex trafficking, too.
 - 3. But, Jesus takes it more seriously than we do.
 - 4. Jesus wants to deal with sex trafficking by getting rid of the root which is lust, the desire to use another human being for my personal pleasure.
 - 5. Jesus is more serious than we are about evil in this world.
 - vii. Illustration: We look at the world and we see the ravage of racism and genocide that goes with it. We want it out of our world.

1. Jesus also wants it out of the world, and he is more serious about it than we are.
 2. Jesus not only wants to get rid of racism and genocide, but he wants to get rid of pride, contempt, and rage from the human heart.
 3. Genocide and sex trafficking are raging fires that are destroying our world, but they are ignited by the small sparks of distortions in the human heart and mind.
- viii. Jesus wants to get the hell out of his world, and he wants to get the hell out of you.
1. That is good news.
 2. And, it is bad news. We want him to get evil out of this world. But, I want God to do it without having to get rid of me.
 3. We have met the enemy, and he is us.
 4. This is good news because God came like surgeon to take life threatening stuff out of our lives.
- ix. I have good news for us today:
1. Jesus lived how humans were meant to live.
 2. Jesus lived a hell free, evil free life.
 3. Jesus lived a life in total union and love with God.
 4. Jesus lived a life that only gives, only loves, and is only other-centered.
 5. God allows the hell that we have created to overwhelm him (John 3:16), to kill him, and to exhaust its power on him.
 6. The cross of Jesus is the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the death and resurrection of our world.
 7. God will not allow hell to get the last word.
 8. The resurrection and life of Jesus is the offer of a hell free existence now and into the future.
 9. Repent and believe the good news.
- g. **How does the Bible say that the story ends?**
- i. Where is hell on the last page of the Bible?
 - ii. C.S. Lewis says that "hell is God's monument to human dignity and choice."
 - iii. If someone refuses to be healed by the Great Physician, God will honor that decision.
 1. And, what God will not do is to allow hell to continue ruining his good work.
 - iv. So, the image of Revelation is the Great Garden City and Earth together again, and hell is outside the city for those who don't

want to be a part of God's restoration work (Revelation 22:14-15).

- v. And, we know that hell is for the devil, demons, and spiritual powers that also aided in the corruption and defilement of this world with evil (Revelation 20:7-10).
- vi. It is God's mercy to contain human and demonic evil and not let it eternally ravage his good world and image bearing humans.

7. So, this is the good news.

- a. Repent and believe the good news.
- b. God wants to get the hell out of you.
- c. The good news is that God loves you so much that he lived for you, that he died for you, and that he was raised for you.
- d. Turn to him and believe the good news.

8. This story is a challenging story and a compelling story.

- a. Your friend or family member who doesn't know Jesus also wants all things new and the hell out of earth.
- b. Your neighbor wants the same thing God wants.
- c. Helping people come to this realization will involve a lot of conversation in order to help them see that they want what God is doing in the earth.
- d. And, it is a compelling story.
- e. And, you won't share this compelling story unless you are experiencing the love of Jesus at work in you healing you, changing you, forming the nature of Christ in you, and removing the hell out of your life.

9. Call to action:

- a. Pray for your friends and family members and bless them.
- b. Pray that God will prepare their hearts for a conversation.
- c. Ask the Lord to open up the opportunity at the right time for you to ask questions and to enter into dialogue with them.
- d. Ask the Lord to prepare that ground of their hearts so that the time is right for y'all to share.
- e. Ask the Lord to show you when the time is right and the moment is right for when they are ready to receive that conversation and the good news.
- f. Ask the Lord to give you the opportunity to talk about how much Jesus loves this them and this world.