



The Beauty and the Power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Our Mission Part 3

1 Peter 3:18 & Psalm 27:4

Justin Taylor, Elder

August 21, 2011

Lord, it is a glorious privilege to gather this morning with Your people underneath Your word and in Your presence. Lord, in these next few minutes we have together, I ask that You would fill me with Your Holy Spirit, make me faithful, Lord, to You and to Your Word. Make my affections in proportion to the truth that will be proclaimed. I pray that You would give all of us, me included, ears to listen as You speak to us. Lord, we ask for Your grace, we ask for Your help, we ask for Your mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you have your bulletins, pull it out for just a moment. I want you to look on the front of the bulletin. Every week you should see our mission statement for New Covenant Bible Church. This is a 20-word summary of who we are. A 20-word summary of why we exist and it's a wonderful thing to be able to give a one-sentence answer of why this church is here on this planet.

Our mission statement says:

To bring glory to God
through
Spirit-transformed lives
by the
Beauty and power
of the
Gospel of Jesus Christ

“To bring glory to God through Spirit-transformed lives by the beauty and power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

My sermon this morning completes a mini-series of three sermons on this mission statement, with Pastor David Sunday in the first week talking about the glory of God, how God has called a people to Himself to proclaim His excellencies and to live for His glory. All of us everywhere around the planet live to glorify something and we are saying first and foremost we exist to glorify God Himself.

Then last week, if you were here, you'll remember Pastor Dave DeHaan preached on Spirit-transformed lives. We need to have Spirit-transformed lives because we don't live for God's glory. We want to glorify God and this is the way that we glorify God, by the Spirit Himself transforming our lives. But then the question becomes how?

The Spirit is a Person, not just a "force" or something like electricity. He is a Person, an agent, the One doing the changing. How does He bring about this change all of us so desperately need? We're persuaded from Scripture the Spirit changes us by the beauty and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This sentence can be multiplied many times over. The truth of the gospel is implied here, but we want to keep the facts front and center that we find the gospel not only true, but beautiful. Something to be marveled at. Something to be proclaimed because it has power to change each of our lives for the glory of God.

Speaking on behalf of the pastors and elders, our deepest prayer is that each one of us would truly own this mission statement. That it would not just be something you would see on the bulletin, it would not just be a nice, cute summary but that it would truly reflect the heartbeat of each and every member of this congregation. Whether your primary ministry is building maintenance, working with the deacons, changing diapers in the nursery, working on the sound-board, praying for our missionaries or visiting those who are in prison. There are ten thousand ministries that we can do and we can do all of these as bullet points, as elaborations underneath this statement that, "We exist to glorify God through Spirit-transformed lives by means of the beauty and the power of Jesus Christ and His gospel."

A friend recently put it this way: “The gospel is the main thing, but it’s not the only thing.” We want to see the gospel as the soil for all our ministries. Fruit cannot be born if it’s not deeply planted in the gospel. We want the gospel of Jesus Christ to be the air that we breathe here. We want to commend the gospel, not only to unbelievers, but to each other in our counseling, our marriages, our friendships, with our roommates, with unbelievers at work.

My task this morning is to unpack the gospel. The whole message will be about the gospel story. Even with an entire message about the gospel, we will barely skim the surface of what the gospel really means and all of its implications for us. This sermon will be a little bit unusual in that we are not going to look at a specific passage but sort of fly over multiple passages. So just to warn you in advance what we’re going to do, I’m going to try to paint a picture as briefly as I can of the story-line of Scripture. Starting this fall, Pastor David and the Sunday School classes will be looking more in-depth at the story-line of Scripture as it unfolds.

First, we have to answer the question, “What is the gospel?” What does that word mean? The Greek word is εὐαγγέλιον (euaggelion) which is completely irrelevant but it’s a nice thing to be able to tell other people that you know what the real Greek word means. It simply means “good news.” The Gospel is news and it is good news. So somebody who comes and heralds or proclaims the message of the gospel - if you wanted to transliterate - could be a “gospel-er” or a “proclaimer” of the good news.

Martin Lloyd Jones had something very helpful one time to say, when he said, “There is a difference between ‘good news’ and ‘good advice’.” You know, a military commander can have advisors come and give him good advice, good counsel. Advice and counsel is about something that is uncertain, something that has not yet happened. Advice proclaims strategies, rites, rituals, different ways to go about strategizing for a certain outcome.

But the gospel is not ‘good advice.’ The gospel is good news. The gospel proclaims something that has already been done. The gospel is *not* “I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.” The gospel is the story of what Jesus Christ

accomplished for us—on our behalf—two thousand years ago. One way to think about is that all world religions are good advice but the true religion—Christianity—is the only one that proclaims good news.

Imagine for a moment that somebody bursts through these doors mid-sermon and begins shouting that he has good news. What if he is saying, “Good news! The enemy has been defeated, the commander is victorious! Everything has changed. Respond in the right way and live in light of it and everything will be changed. You will be free. You will be free indeed.” If this guy is standing in the middle of the room shouting this news to us, what would you do? How would you respond?

Some people are strategic thinkers. They’re identifying the exit points, thinking, “Who’s going to tackle this guy?” They’re texting 911. But don’t take it too literally. The immediate emotion all of us would have would be some form of excitement. Somebody has come in here and is proclaiming good news, proclaiming victory, proclaiming defeat. But this excitement that may be temporary euphoria is going to quickly dissipate. It’s going to fade away if you have no idea what he’s talking about.

We not only need good news, we not only need a glorious announcement, but we need a story. We need some context. If you don’t know who is victorious, who has been defeated, if you don’t know how you’re supposed to respond, the good news can sound great at first but ultimately, it’s practically meaningless. You need to know the beginning of the story. You need to know the main characters in this story. Who are the good guys? Who are the bad guys? What went wrong? Who’s fighting? What are they fighting for? How can this be set right? Where is this story going?

So in the time we have left I want to simply and very sketch-ily review the story of the gospel. I encourage you to resist the temptation—I assume a few of you feel this temptation because I feel this temptation—if somebody stood up and said, “I’m going to retell the basics of the story of the gospel.” I would think, “Oh, I’m glad he’s going to do that for the unbelievers who are here. You know, somebody

by chance happened to come in, they've never been to church before—this is great! They'll get a rehearsal of the gospel. They can respond to the gospel.”

You've heard David Sunday and you've heard other pastors here say this before. You will hear us say it again over and over and over again, and I hope you never tire of it. The gospel is not only for unbelievers, it's for believers. It's not only for those who come to church on Easter and Christmas, and maybe a couple other times, but it's also for those who have practically grown up in the church. It's not only for adults but it's for the smallest of our kids. All of us need to hear the gospel over and over and over and over again.

As I retell some of the basics, I'm going to mainly focus on the beginning and the big change that comes in the middle. I want to encourage you to remember something that most of you would probably affirm. But we need to remember specifically that all of this really did happen. Sometimes we can read it and become familiar with it and forget these are things that really did happen in space, time and history.

These are real people we are talking about in Scripture, such that if you held the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, you were holding a real “apple” lets say. If you were to walk up to Noah and ask him what he was doing as he was building this gargantuan boat and you were to run your hand alongside the ark, you could get a real splinter in your hand. These are not just interesting stories that are supposed to help us with spiritual truth; they are really things that happened.

These were real human beings like us that had families; that had fears. If you were among the throng of Israelites who were escaping from Egypt and walking across the Red Sea, you would feel the seaweed and the mud squish into your sandals. If you were walking with Jesus, you would smell Peter's bad breath as he's yelling another idea. You would see the fingernails and the dirt underneath them of Jesus Christ. You could walk up to the tomb and place your hand upon the hard, cold stone. These things really did happen.

It's also important to know that it's not just a true story about people long ago, but that we are characters in this story.

My mom recently pulled out some things from a collection. I don't know if any of you had anything like this but back in the 80's people would come around door-to-door and sell these little books where you could have your child's personal information inscribed in them. So this Mother Goose story would have two characters named Justin and Jeremy with their dog Skeeter, and they lived on Dearborn Avenue. It was just such a thrilling thing to read! Here's Mother Goose and I'm really a character in this story!

We *are* characters in the Biblical story. This *is* our story. If you're a believer, or if you're an unbeliever, this story is about *you*. It's about where you came from and about where you are going and how you can get right with God.

The story actually starts before Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:1 is the first action we see in the history of God creating the heavens and the earth but before there could be a creation of the heavens and the earth, there had to be a God who existed—mindblowingly—for all of eternity. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. One God, one Nature, one Essence in three Persons. And they weren't lonely. They weren't needy. There was perfect fellowship, perfect contentment, perfect delight in the fellowship of the Trinity. Acts 17:25 says that our God is not “...*served by human hands, as though he needed anything...*”, so don't tell your kids that God created because He was lonely, because He wasn't.

So why *did* He create? Why did He create the heavens and the earth? He created to show and to overflow His glory. Jonathan Edwards said, “It's no argument or deficiency of a fountain that it is inclined to overflow.” So God created the heavens and the earth for His glory and for our joy.

So as you go through the first couple chapters of Scripture, you see God creating sun and moon and stars and the earth and the water and the animals in the water and on the land. He says over and over again, “It is good...it is good...it is good.” Then the pinnacle of creation is that God creates beings in His image—to take after His likeness—and for the first time God says “It's very good”.

He has these beings, Adam is the man, Eve is the woman. They are designed to resemble Him and His attributes, designed to reflect back God's character and His

glory. They are designed to rejoice in God Himself and all of His goodness and His creation and nothing was wrong. Nothing is wrong and everything is right.

Here's a crucial part of the story. Adam and Eve are not just the first human beings. They are not merely our first parents. God designs Adam in such a way that he would also be our representative. He would be the head of a covenant people.

We like to say in America, that we live in a democracy but we don't. In a pure democracy, every single person (every eligible person) would have an equal vote and an equal say. But, we live in a representative democracy where, at least theoretically, we send representatives whom we elect to Springfield or to Washington, D.C., who represent our interests. They are the ones who get to vote, not us. Adam is our representative. He is an elected representative but he wasn't elected by us. He was elected by God Himself to serve as the covenant head, so that as Adam went, so goes the human race. If Adam had obeyed, if Adam had passed the test, if he'd remained faithful in the Garden, there would have been no sin entering into the world. Satan would have not had any power to threaten us. There would be no sadness. There would be no sickness. We all know Adam didn't obey.

As you see tragedies on T.V. and as you see sickness in your own family, trace it back to that event in the Garden because Adam failed. He rebelled. He didn't guard the Garden. He stood by passively as the serpent Satanically slithered into the garden and around the only tree that was forbidden for them to eat. He didn't say a word as Satan tempted his wife, as she undermined God's Word and its authority and its sufficiency and its necessity. He didn't say a word as she bit into the fruit. And he didn't say a word when she offered it to him and he did the same, choosing the immediate gratification of his taste buds over the glory of God Himself.

As an old primer in New England illustrated the letter "A" with these words: "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." And for the first time on Earth, everything was wrong and nothing was right.

We don't have time to walk through all the stories, but as you try to read through the Old Testament, you read about Adam and Eve starting over, in a sense, after they're expelled from the Garden to the east. As Adam and Eve longed for this Deliverer to come from the seed of Eve to crush the serpent, one of their sons ends up killing the other one.

Then we see Noah, righteous Noah. God is so fed up with the wickedness of the land that He wipes out all mankind and saves one righteous family, preserves them, saves them in an ark. But after the waters dissipate, Noah goes out and he worships and we think, "We're starting over—this is going to be good" and Noah goes and gets drunk.

You can trace it through Abraham and his failures. He seems like a faithful man, who by faith is leaving his hometown to follow God not knowing where it's going to take him. One of the first things he does is deny that his wife is even his wife and allows her to potentially be violated because of his own fear of man.

Or we have Moses and his failures. Moses seems so good, so faithful but then at the very end, after years of wandering, years of grumbling by the Israelites, Moses blatantly disobeys and doesn't even get to see the Promised Land that he longed for.

Or King David—the man after God's own heart. God promises his throne is going to exist forever but David takes another man's wife and kills her husband.

Or King Solomon who has this glorious temple built. God gives him all this wisdom and it all ends in shambles with him preferring the foolishness of illicit sex and power and money rather than the glory of God.

And the exile—finally they're coming back from the exile and you think this may be a chance to start over, maybe they can rebuild the temple, maybe things can get going well again. What you see instead is grown men crying for the glory that has been lost.

Then God executes the second phase of His plan. This is not "plan B." This is God's plan from the beginning. God declared He would send His Son, His only Son. Galatians 4:4-5 says, "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,*

born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

God’s first son—Adam is called His son—failed. Israel—called God’s son—failed. Then God sends His true Son so that we could become “sons of God” by adoption.

If we had time we could walk through Jesus’ life, through His public ministry, through His various teachings, but it all culminates—it all reaches a crescendo—in April of A.D. 33 when Jesus makes His march and sets His face toward Jerusalem. Jesus dies on a Friday afternoon on a small hill called Golgotha, or Calvary. It is outside the Jerusalem walls. Late the night before—at the celebration of Passover on Thursday night—He had dinner in the upper room of a borrowed house inside Jerusalem with His best friends in the world, His disciples. As they went out, they left the city walls of Jerusalem. They went across the Kidron Valley and they went to a garden. It was probably past midnight at this point. Early, early on Friday morning, Jesus knows that this is the end.

As he implores His friends, His disciples, “Just stay up, guys. Just stay awake. Watch. Pray...” They can’t do that and Jesus is by Himself. Only Him and the Father and the Spirit. Jesus cries out. Scripture says that His sweat was so thick that it was falling from his face like blood drops. He cries in anguish, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”

If you’re reading through this for the first time, where have you heard the word “cup” before? Well, just a few hours before in the upper room, they were celebrating the Passover supper and Jesus drank from the cup and said, “This is going to be the New Covenant in My blood” and He shared it with His disciples. The cup is a symbol of fellowship. It’s something that people would partake of together. They would pass the cup around and drink from it. But Jesus is talking about something deeper, something horrific, something terrifying, because Jesus knew all of the Hebrew Scriptures. He knew Isaiah 51 and Jeremiah 25 that talked about the cup, not in terms of the wonderful symbol of fellowship and friendship, but as the cup of the wine of wrath.

Jesus says, “If there’s any way, Father, that I can avoid drinking the cup of the wine of Your wrath, let it pass from Me. But not My will, let Yours be done.”

You remember where He is when He’s saying this, right? He’s in the garden. The story starts in the garden. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden. They were commanded by God to be obedient. Adam and Eve were in the garden when they faced their test. Adam stood before a tree and he had a choice to make whether to obey Satan or to obey God. Adam stood before that tree in that garden and he failed the test.

Jesus now stands before a different kind of tree. He knows from Deuteronomy the curse that would be on somebody who hung on a tree and He knew the punishment He would have to endure. He is taken to the various Jewish trials and Roman trials. He goes to see Caiaphas and Annas and Pilate and Herod, now back to Pilate. He is finally led out to that hill to be crucified between two “other” criminals, the blood pouring from His hands. The blood, literally now, pours from His forehead as the thorns press against His scalp. The blood pours from His feet. The blood pours from His lacerated back as He had to scrape Himself up against the wood in order to get out one more breath before He could scream, “It is finished.”

But none of that tortuous, evil inflicted upon Him compared to the feeling of being forsaken by the hand of His Father.

The sky goes dark, the Father turns His face away and Jesus bears the white-hot, furious wrath of God upon His head. When it is over, the temple curtain tears in two, they shove a spear in His side to make sure He is truly dead. They bring Him down and bury Him in a friend’s tomb, His body wrapped in a linen shroud.

As you think about this story, think about what Saturday was like. Saturday was the Sabbath. They got this all done Friday night before the sun set, according to the Jewish rules, and Saturday was a day of silence. Maybe they were wondering, “Well, is He going to come back now? Is He going to come back now? Maybe this was all just a fool’s errand for us. Maybe He wasn’t telling the truth.” But an entire

day waking up, “Yes—it really did happen.” Going to bed Saturday night thinking, “He’s still not alive”.

Then Sunday morning to hear the wonderful proclamation, the news, the announcement, “He is risen! Jesus is alive!” He has conquered the grave. Death has been put to death. Sin and Satan have been dealt a mortal blow. And Jesus was with them and He talked with them and ate with them and laughed with them and then they saw Him ascend to His Father’s right hand. Even now, as we said earlier in our statement of faith, He is ruling from His Father’s right hand. He is interceding for us. He’s praying for us. As you go home and you cry out to God for the sins that you’re struggling with, the people in your family who are sick and hurting and are in pain, Jesus Christ Himself—in flesh and blood—is there interceding at the throne of grace on your behalf.

There are many complex ways we can classify people in this world and as time goes on, more classifications will come: racial classifications, ethnic classifications, gender classifications, socioeconomic classifications. I don’t think God cares that much about those but He does tell us that we can divide the whole human race into two camps. There are only two kinds of people in this world: those who are in Adam, and those who are in Jesus Christ. You can divide this room but only God knows who belongs to Him.

All of us, no matter our background, no matter how good life seems or how bad life seems, no matter where we came from, all of us were born in Adam. We were born with Adam as our representative. We were born so that when God looks at us He sees Adam’s failure as our failure. As we start to sin, we show it; we demonstrate that we are children of Adam. That means we are children of wrath. We are under the judgment of God. From our conception—from the moment we are a microscopic embryo—we are all born in bondage. We are all born with Adam as our representative. But open to all is the opportunity to come to Jesus Christ and to be in Jesus Christ.

See, if you come to Jesus and you see Him as not merely Somebody you say a prayer to, not merely as a get-out-of-hell-free card, not merely as a Savior, but a

Savior to be cherished, as a treasure to be marveled, as a Lord to be followed. You can be in Christ and all of God's disposition toward you, all of His actions toward you, all of His attitudes toward you will be grace upon grace upon grace.

This will mean that your sins are forgiven. One of the most beautiful lines in Scripture, I think, is Psalm 103:12, "*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.*" He takes all our sins and puts them away. Not just our garden-variety everyday sins, but our shameful sins. The sins we want no one to know about. The sins that make our hearts beat faster for shame of how we have wronged our great God. All of our sins are put away.

But you know, even that's not enough. Having all your sins put away does not make you righteous before God. Just like declaring bankruptcy and having all your debts removed does not give you a triple-A credit rating. Because a defendant in court is declared to be innocent does not necessarily make him a righteous man. We need righteousness to go to heaven. Only perfect people will go to heaven and none of us are perfect, so we need to clothe ourselves with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So it's not just that God does not view you as if you've never sinned, He does that, but He also views you as if you have always obeyed. Will you bank on Jesus? Will you not only acknowledge this great exchange but sing of this glorious exchange? Would you exalt in this glorious exchange where we receive righteousness and Christ takes upon His back our unrighteousness? Can we sing from the heart:

Lord, the condemnation was **Yours**, that the justification might be **mine!**
The agony was Yours, that the victory might be mine!
The pain was Yours, and the ease mine!
The stripes were Yours, and the healing balm issuing from them mine!
The vinegar and gall were Yours, that the honey and sweet might be mine!
The curse was Yours, that the blessing might be mine!
The crown of thorns was Yours, that the crown of glory might be mine!
The death was Yours, the life purchased by it mine!
You paid the price, that I might enjoy the inheritance!

John Flavel's "The Fountain of Life"

When you look at this mission statement: "...the beauty and the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ..." do you see it as beautiful? Do you see it as powerful? Or is it something you merely assume, something you merely acknowledge intellectually? If you don't see the beauty, if in your heart of hearts you say, "I don't see the gospel as beautiful. I might acknowledge it, I might believe it, but I don't see it as beautiful," there's not a person in this room who can help you see. But I would encourage you—I would beg you—to cry out to God until you see it. Tell Him, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief. I see dimly but I want to see the beauty of the gospel and I want to see Jesus face-to-face."

Some of you, I know, are tired. You feel like in some ways you're on a treadmill of trying to do good things to impress God, to impress other people. And it gets tiring. It gets tiring spinning the plates. It gets tiring trying to keep the mask in place so that people don't see who you really are and what's really going on. But whether you are a believer who has walked with Jesus for decades, or whether you don't know if you truly believe, Jesus Christ has one word for you this morning, and that is "Come."

In Matthew 11:28-30 He invites you to come to Him. To come and see Him. To come and behold Him and His beauty.

There are some criteria. There are some things you need to do first. You need to acknowledge that there's nothing in your hand that you can bring. His criteria are that you are at the end of your rope, that you're heavy laden. Here's how He said it and it's a command to each of us: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

In Isaiah 55 there is something similar, where Isaiah is responding for the Word of God gives a similar command, and He tells you to come, commands you to come, invites you to come, implores you to come. The only thing you need to do is to have nothing. The only thing you need to have is thirst. He says "Come."

*"Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price."*

This may be a word to some of us:

*"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live...
'Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near;'"*

Lord, my prayer is that all of us, young or old, believer or unbeliever, will come to Jesus. Lord, You *are* beautiful; You *are* glorious. We want to see marriages restored. We want to see wayward children brought home. We want to see Your gospel proclaimed in the neighborhoods and to the nations. Lord, even as I'm praying and Jesus is interceding, would You incline people to Yourself so that we can truly sing from our hearts, "You are a beautiful Savior." In Jesus' name, Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.net ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.net