

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is the Gospel? (Part 1)

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA June 22, 2014

I. Introduction

Are you stuck in a life where you're just scraping by and hoping for the best? Is that what your life feels like? You're fighting with your spouse, fighting with your kids, your boss is unreasonable, and you're barely staying ahead of the bills. What if things were different? What if it was possible to reverse the mess you're in? What if your marriage was something you looked forward to, what if your kids actually listened to you, and your boss respected you?.....is such a life possible?

II. The Word *Gospel* Means Good News, but What's the *Goodnews*?

What's the bad news? In order to define the *Goodnews* we need to know what the *badnews* is. In the Garden of Eden we had paradise. This means that we had perfect environment. There was no toxic waste, dirty water, drought, scorching heat, freezing temperatures, famines, typhoons, tsunamis, earthquakes, disease, etc. It also means that we enjoyed perfect relationships. There was no divorce, foster homes, orphans, foreclosures, recessions, insider trading, war, alcoholism, drug abuse, addiction, pornography, discrimination, adultery, jealousy, envy, hatred, greed, etc. And most importantly, we enjoyed a perfect relationship with God. In fact, our perfect relationship with Him enabled us to enjoy the rest of the paradise God had given us. Thus, God was not a terrifying figure to us. We saw Him as our Loving Father and He saw us as His beloved children—we loved Him and He loved us, Genesis 2. All this is good news, so what's the *badnews*? One day we decided to walk away from our relationship with God to become the master of our own universe. We decided to live life apart from Him and when we did we invited death and destruction into every aspect of our lives, the environment, our relationships, and especially our relationship with God; we were now terrified of Him. Therefore, we no longer got along with our environment much less ourselves. We now lived in a world where we hurt and killed each other, Genesis 3-4. The *badnews* in a nutshell is this: we broke our relationship with God and therefore our relationship with everything else...paradise was now lost...but God was still our Loving Father.

What's the *Goodnews*? So what's the Goodnews? Right after we destroyed the paradise God gave us, He promised that one day He would come to save us from the death that now engulfed every aspect of our lives. Now, some think that the Gospel (the *Goodnews*) means salvation from hell. And it is true, the Gospel includes salvation from hell, the eternal resting place for the dead—though they don't get much rest. You see, our problem is sin, which leads to our ultimate problem, death, which is the penalty God demands for sin, any sin, Romans 6:23. And if you're dead, then you cannot live with God because He is life, John 1:1-4; 5:26. So, how are we going to pay for our sin? If we pay, then we die and are forever separated from the life of God. There was no way out of this dilemma without God intervening. So God decided (from the very beginning, Genesis 3:15) to take our death upon Himself. Thus in John 1:29 God reveals what He came to do in the form of His Son, to die for our sins, everyone's sins. But even though Jesus paid our death penalty, we're not saved yet. Why? Because in order for us to accept the salvation that Jesus' sacrifice provides, we have to believe in Him, that He is our Savior—He is the only way out; there is no way we can save ourselves. This is why God says over and over in John's Gospel that if we believe in His Son, He removes our death penalty and gives us everlasting life, John 3:15, 16, 18, 36, etc. And this guarantees that we will NEVER go to hell because we who have believed in Christ get eternal life which spares us the second death of hell, John 5:24-30; Rev 20:11-15 (6, 14).

But the Gospel includes much more than salvation from hell. Jesus didn't just come to save us from an eternal death; He came to save us from death in all its forms: dead relationships of every kind (work, family, home, friends, etc.), dead end jobs, and dead hopes and dreams. Basically He came to save us from a dead and meaningless existence. This is why in John 10:10 Jesus says that He came to give us an abundant life. Do you know what He means? Here's how Colossians 1:13 puts it: the moment we believe in Christ, God plucks us out of Satan's world of darkness and places us in the Kingdom of His Son. And in Jesus' Kingdom there is no divorce, orphans, addiction, wars, foreclosures, crippling credit card debt, envy, social outcasts, bullying, peer pressure, single moms, single dads, etc. "What?! You mean to tell me that there are no Christian single moms or Christians who divorce? That can't be! In fact, isn't the divorce rate among Christians the same as non-Christians, about 50%?!"

No, I'm not saying that in Christianity there are no single moms, or divorce, or orphans for that matter. What I'm saying is that when Christians live life in Christ's Kingdom, He destroys the works of the Devil, 1 John 3:8. Thus, there are no single moms. Why? Because they inherit an entire family that is there to help and support them with food, money, lodging, baby-sitting, anything and everything they need. They are not single moms, i.e., they are not alone. They have the community of the church to support them. And a couple who is miserable (for whatever reason) and wants to divorce, if they bring their marriage into the Kingdom, Jesus, the King, will heal them both and give them a marriage full of love and respect.

This is why when Jesus begins His ministry He announces it this way in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel." He's come to urge the people to stop, turn the other way, and enter His Kingdom. And then He proceeds to show them what life is like in His Kingdom:

There is no disease or social outcasts, Mark 1:40-45—does the King heal every disease always? No, but dealing with a disease in His Kingdom is much better than dealing with it in the world.

There are no crippling sins, Mark 2:1-12—He erases whatever guilt you're carrying around with His forgiveness.

There are no upper and lower classes; the lower classes get to dine with the King, Mark 2:13-17.

The King will keep you from religious error, Mark 2:18-28—He will tell you how to worship God.

The King will provide everything you need and equip you not only for the challenges ahead, but to bring His amazing power to the lives of others, Mark 6:7-13.

The King will warn you when you're wasting your life, chasing the wrong thing, Mark 10:17-22.

A couple is living their marriage in the world, she is frustrated with her husband who is irresponsible and seems to think only of himself. And she's also battling her mother-in-law who keeps spoiling her kids. He is having a horrible time at work and when he gets home all he wants is to relax. And he's also frustrated because she constantly criticizes and corrects him.....but then they enter the Kingdom and ask the King for help and He heals them and their marriage.

III. Conclusion

".... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."