

Do You Believe the Gospel?

Are You a Christian?

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Charles Spurgeon, in his famous work titled "Lectures to My Students," said this about listening to the gospel, and I think that in an era where music is equated with worship and the preaching of the word is assigned to something else, I think that this quote is valuable for us to hear in light of the subject matter about to come. Spurgeon said this, "Rightly to listen to the gospel is one of the noblest parts of the adoration of the Most High." I'll say that again, "Rightly to listen to the gospel is one of the noblest parts of the adoration of the Most High." We are gathered here today in the providence of God to hear a message about the gospel of Jesus Christ with a title said in the form of a question, "Do You Believe the Gospel?" Do you believe the gospel? And this is another message in the short series that we're doing, which asks the question, "Are you a Christian?" Are you a Christian and we have clarified over the last two weeks, for those of you that are just joining us, we have clarified what we're trying to ask with that question by setting forth with great detail what we are not asking because so many people have such a wrong and superficial view of what it means to be a Christian, that to simply ask them the question does not necessarily get to the heart of the matter. I pointed out 14 different things over the last two weeks that we're not asking when we ask whether you are a Christian or not. So we're not asking, do you believe in God? That's something separate. We're not asking whether you've said the sinner's prayer at a revival meeting. Not asking that question. We're not asking whether you attend church. We're not asking whether you live a moral and patriotic life. We're not asking do you think Jesus is Lord. We're not asking if you were born into a Christian family. We're not asking whether you practice religion. Those things are incidental, almost side distractions to the central question are you a Christian, and that's shocking for some people to hear. We're not asking whether you've been baptized. We're not asking if you have stopped sinning We're not asking if you keep the rules. We're not asking if you believe what others believe. We're not asking if you've had an exciting, invigorating, emotional experience. We've not asked whether you've seen or participated in miracles. We're not even asking if you read your Bible. Beloved, listen, we just need to be direct and honest with each other and to say that none of those things prove whether you're a Christian or not; you could be very dead in your sins and say all of those things were true about you and not be a Christian.

There's a common thread through those questions and others like them. I probably could have come up with 21 if I had spent the time on it and wanted to presume upon wearying you with more detail. All 14 of those answers show a reliance on self, they point to

something about us, they point to what we do or what we think, saying in essence, "I've done the right thing, I hang out with the right group, I avoid certain bad behaviors," and in light of the true gospel of Jesus Christ, those things become rather, what's the word that I want here? Those things become unattractive, unappealing. You start to realize why the Apostle Paul, looking at his spiritual heritage in Philippians 3, says, "I count all of those things to be loss. I regard them as refuse, as dung, compared to what the true spiritual reality of the gospel and what it means to be a Christian is." And so what we're trying to do here is kind of use this brief series as a lever, you might say, to dislodge weighty things that are in your mind that you go to naturally in your self-trust, lodge those and let that roll away and replace it with what the right considerations should be.

Beloved, what I'm about to say is going to be so obvious to you that it will be shocking to you that we somehow miss all of this. We miss the most basic thing when we ask the most basic question. When I ask are you a Christian, the first thing that we need to answer, the first question that we need to answer is this: do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? It starts there. You can't bypass the gospel when you are considering whether you are a Christian because the gospel is the starting point of it all. And it would be an interesting exercise, threatening to many, no doubt, and I'm not going to do this, so I'm just making a point here, but if we just lined everybody up and one by one said, "Please explain to me what the gospel of Jesus Christ is. Tell me what the gospel is." Because it is the gospel, it says in Romans chapter 1 verses 16 and 17, I'll just quote verse 16, Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it, the gospel, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." If you are going to be saved, you have to know what the gospel is and you not only have to know what it is, you have to believe it. That's what the Bible says. Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel," which is a negative way, a literary way of saying, "I am very proud of the gospel. I delight of the gospel. I love to set forth the gospel," Paul is saying in that understated way and he says, "the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." So to ask the question are you a Christian, is to say are you a possessor of the salvation that God gives to everyone who believes? And to ask that question is to lead us straight into the gospel because the gospel is what God uses with power to bring salvation to everyone who believes. And so if we don't address what the gospel is, we're not even really entering into the question of whether you are a Christian or not. You cannot be a Christian apart from the revealed gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel has a certain content to it. The gospel is not about you having your feelings about the Jesus that you imagine to be real. It's not about that. There is a fixed, revealed content of truth that constitutes the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you must know that, you must believe that, and God must bring it to your heart with power, or you're not a Christian. I mean that's what it says, beloved.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and so while it might be unsettling to have all of those 14 matters disabused from your mind, it might be unsettling to say and to recognize in your heart, "This is a little bit scary to me because when you talk like that, you know, I don't know that I can express the gospel. I don't know that I could tell someone the gospel straight off. And so that, you know, if what you're saying is true, then, you know, maybe I need, you know, this is unsettling." Well

good, it should be unsettling to you. Beloved, when we ask the question are you a Christian, you must absolutely start with, the starting point is knowing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. To talk about anything else is to miss the point. To talk about these other things without the gospel being front and center in the middle of it is to miss the point in a most sad and miserable way. To explain what it means to be a Christian, as you're training your children, apart from the gospel, is ultimately to be an instrument of misleading them about the truth. So today we're going to ask you the question do you believe the gospel and we're going to go through five different elements of truth that constitute the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So we need to start with the term gospel itself and just in a simple way explain what that term means. The word "gospel" means "good news." It is God's good news to man. So when we talk about the gospel, we're talking about something that is good news from God to man. That is much, much different, the content of a message from God to man is much different than talking about what you do, what you believe, and what all of your great attributes are. Do you see that? To talk about a message from God is much different than talking about what you do and what you say you believe in a general way or what you have done in the past. "I've been baptized, I walked the aisle, signed the card." And I pause just to let this sink in because I'm persuaded that it's precisely at this point that there is such divergence in the thinking of many, such muddled thinking. Beloved, how could we possibly talk about whether we're a Christian or not if we don't start with the gospel? The answer to the question, are you a Christian, must begin with, do you believe the gospel because there is no other message given under heaven by which we must be saved. There is no other name under heaven but the name of Christ by which we must be saved.

And I sympathize, you know, I've been in the, it's been four decades now that I've been since the Lord saved me. You come to church week after week, month after month, year after year, and you do just start to assume things. And others come in, the Lord brings others new to our church, and it's easy for a church anywhere to just fall into a lot of assumptions, presumptions, and forgetting the first love which we had, which Christ rebukes specifically in Revelation chapter 2. And so what we want to do today is talk about the gospel, and all along as we're talking about it, two things, we are engaged in an act of worship, of high holy worship as we consider the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are considering under the influence of the Holy Spirit as we look into the inerrant word of God, we are considering what a holy God has revealed to mankind about the only means of salvation that he has appointed. That is an act of worship high and far above even the best of glorious music from a platform. And as we're going through these five elements of the gospel, we're asking do you believe this? Do you believe each of these things with all of your being, without reservation, without hypocrisy, with all of the full earnestness that you can possibly imagine, is this what your heart embraces as truth? And as you go through these things, one by one, they start to help you understand what the gospel is.

Now, just to peek ahead to next week, there's really two aspects that have to be addressed when you answer the question are you a Christian? Yes, do you believe the gospel, and that's what we're going to look at today, but there's a second aspect to it also, which I

think we sometimes don't emphasize enough. Paul says there in Romans 1:16, the gospel is the power of God. There is a power in the gospel. There is an authority. There is a strength. There is a principle of dynamic spiritual change that takes place in the gospel. When it is really received and a person is truly saved, there's a power at work that changes different aspects of you irretrievably and profoundly. And so when we ask are you a Christian, we have to start with what we're doing here today, do you believe the gospel, which means, you know, do you even know what the gospel is, and knowing what it is, do you believe that and affirm it with all of your heart? Do you believe the gospel, that's one aspect of it, but there's a second follow-up question that we'll come to next week and it's this: do you know the gospel's power? Has the gospel come to your life with converting, changing power in a manner that is consistent with what Scripture describes to be the impact of the gospel on the one that is truly converted? You know, so it's not just simply a matter of what we're dealing with today and next week, this is, in some ways, this is the most important thing that I could say, it's to understand that we're not simply talking about an intellectual content, simply intellectual affirmations, that in a detached way, you say, "Yes, I believe that," and just go on living the same way without any change in your life, without any force of compulsion from your inner man to respond to it. We're not asking whether you believe in just an intellectual way, we're asking whether these things have come to you with power in a way that you can rightly be said, and I'm just using biblical language here, that you have been born again, that you are a new creation in Christ, that you are a new man and the old you has passed away, behold, new things have come. It's a two-part question, do you believe the gospel and has that come to you with power? That's what we're asking here this week and next week.

And so what I want to do, I want to invite you to turn to a classic text for the meaning of the gospel, 1 Corinthians chapter 15. 1 Corinthians chapter 15. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, there are certain things, there are certain doctrines, there are certain historical facts that you must believe in order to be a Christian. You cannot say, "Well, I believe in the Christian ethic, I believe in Christian morality, but I don't want to be bothered with the doctrine, or I don't think the doctrine is that important." You can't do that. There is a fundamental core of truth in the gospel that the Bible says you must believe in order to be saved and if you don't believe these things, you are not a Christian no matter how much of a moral person you might be on the outside.

So 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 1 through 4, the Apostle Paul says, "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain." You can have a certain superficial affirmation, a superficial belief in the gospel that ultimately proves to be in vain because it hasn't come to your heart with converting power. But Paul says, "I want to remind you of the gospel," and so, while some of you may be saying, "You know, I know the gospel, and so this is nothing new to me." Well, maybe so, but I don't mind standing in the sandals of the Apostle Paul and saying I'm going to remind you of the gospel regardless.

And what does Paul go on to say? In verse 3, he says, "For," so what follows is an explanation of what he had just said in the prior two verses. He's emphasizing the gospel,

and he says, "For." He's going to explain what the gospel is and notice, beloved, how he describes the gospel in the context of what I have been saying to you this morning and the past two weeks. Paul says, "I delivered to you as of first importance." This is the highest priority, not in our context here, not those other 14 things that are self-focused and can tend to nothing more than spiritual pride. Paul says, "I gave to you and I told you this is the most important thing. This is the critical thing that you must not overlook," Paul says. "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received." Now listen, beloved, we're going very slow, very much step by step here. The man or woman who is genuinely concerned about the state of his eternal soul does not despise a consideration of these things which are most important. In fact, those that are concerned for their eternal souls would flock to a consideration of these most important things. I have an eternal soul and I have a day appointed in which I am going to stand before a holy God. Do I ever need to know what's going to happen on that day, at that time? Will it be well with me on that day, or will it be a colossal ruin? That's a matter of first importance.

So Paul says, "Let me remind you of what I said to you about the gospel," verse 3, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." The gospel, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. You see, and he did that on our behalf. He died for our sins. He died for the sins of his people. And so, beloved, now we enter into things, and I'm about to start the five points here, and they'll go rather quickly when I do. Understand this basic principle: the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ did a work on behalf of sinners and in that work, as part of that work, he was crucified, he was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day. That's the gospel. That's the message of good news from God that his Son has done something to deliver men in sin from the power and consequences of sin, and what he has done, he was crucified, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day.

So, beloved, I ask you whether you believe that truth which is central to the gospel? Do you believe in the crucifixion of Christ? Do you believe that he literally hung on a wooden cross in time and space as the incarnate Son of God, do you believe that that historical event took place? Do you believe that that crucifixion was so real that if you had been there and rubbed your hands against the cross on which Christ hung, that you would have received splinters in your hand? Was it that real? Was it that historical? Did that really happen? The Bible says you can't be saved without believing that. He was buried. He was raised on the third day.

In Romans, it says if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved, which by negative implication, if you don't believe that, you're not saved no matter what else you may do or think, Scripture tells us, God tells us in his word, Christ was crucified, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day. Beloved, I'm asking you, when I ask if you're a Christian, we're starting by saying do you believe the testimony of God or do you reject that? Or are you indifferent to that, could you not care less about that, but you want to keep up good appearances? Jesus Christ crucified, buried, and raised on the third day, that's what the gospel tells us. He did it for our sins. Do you

believe that? That's the starting point of asking whether you are a Christian or not. Do you believe the truth that is central to the gospel?

Now, let me just quickly go through five doctrinal truths that underlie this statement of the gospel, and along the way, you should be asking yourself, "Do I believe that? Do I affirm that from the bottom of my heart without reservation?" First of all, the gospel teaches us about the holiness of God. The Bible teaches us about the holiness of God. Why was it necessary for Christ to die for our sins? It's because God is holy and our sin separates us from a holy God so something had to be done about our sins to remove the barrier that was keeping us from God. That's central to the gospel. And so as we consider point number one, the holiness of God, the Bible tells us that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and that God is the giver of life to all men. In this God, in this one God, we live and move and have our being, it says in Acts 17 verse 28, so that central to your existence as a human being is that your origin comes from God. The earth on which you live was created by God. The heavens above you were created by God. The life that you have was given to you by God. And as you continue walking day by day and in your existence, it is in a realm that God dominates, that God sustains, that God is central to the reality of. Do you believe that? Do you know that to be true or have you bought into the false evolutionary philosophies of our day? We stand at a fork in the road, believing what God says, believing what man says. You can't have it both ways, beloved.

Now, this God who created us and the world and environment in which we live, the Bible tells us that that God is holy. He is separate and distinct from everything else. There is no one like him. He is holy in the sense that he is morally perfect and he is good. Scripture says in Isaiah chapter 6 verse 3, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" It's not just that this God is holy, it's not just that he's morally perfect and good, he's holy, holy, holy, transcendently holy, unapproachably holy. Scripture says no man can look upon him and live, that's how holy he is. And this holy God, the Bible says, this giver of life, the Bible says, holds us accountable for what we do with what he has given to us. He has given us life, he's given us opportunities, resources, responsibilities, and Scripture says that he holds us accountable and he will hold us accountable for what we have done with that.

Turn to the book of Acts chapter 17 with me. Acts chapter 17. Beginning in verse 29, the Apostle Paul says, "Being then God's offspring," we are created by God, "we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man." We ought not to think that religion is simply the opiate of the masses. We shouldn't think that the true God is something that men conjured up in their mind without a corresponding reality, as if God is reduced to something that man came up with. We shouldn't think that way, Paul says. Verse 30, he says, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Beloved, look at it there in verse 31, he's fixed a day. There is an appointed day coming quickly on which this holy God will judge the world in righteousness, and he'll

do it through the one he has appointed, the Lord Jesus Christ, and of this we know for certain because Christ has been raised from the dead.

Beloved, that is a universal warning that goes out, it says there, to all people everywhere. Are you one of the people? Are you a people? Are you a man? Are you a woman? Then this universal warning goes out to you that God will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and so we're immediately faced with the question, do you believe the holiness of God, do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ because the gospel teaches us about the holiness of God and the consequences of the holiness of God that it has for every man, woman, and child that has ever lived. Do you believe that? The gospel starts with God, not what you do. The gospel starts with his holiness. That brings us to a second point here this morning, which we could simply title it the sinfulness of man. The sinfulness of man and Scripture tells us that this holy God will not receive sinners into his presence. Universalism, the idea that all people will be saved in the end, is a lie from the pit of hell. That is not true. And so there is going to be a division between sheep and goats, between wheat and tares, and in that coming day, Scripture describes a separating process where the sheep will be put on the left representing those who are truly saved, and the goats will be put on the right, those who are not saved. There will be a cleavage introduced. There will be a separation taking place. And what I'm asking when I say, ask the question, are you a Christian, I'm asking which side of the divide will you end up on? Even if you don't care about that question for yourself, I care about that question for you and so we're talking about these things.

The sinfulness of man. The Bible teaches that a holy God will not receive sinners into his presence. 1 John 1 verse 5 says, "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." His holiness is absolute and he cannot receive tainted sinners into his presence any more than the human body can take in rancid meat and remain unaffected by it. You keep out rancid meat from your system. God, in a much greater, higher way, keeps sin and sinners out of his presence. There is no darkness at all. He requires perfection to enter into his presence. Matthew 5:48 says, "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Now, beloved, and I'm using that word a lot today, I know, beloved, because I understand that we're dealing with the most important, tender aspects of your existence here, what's going to happen to you in eternity? And we're talking about these things because they're revealed in Scripture; on a human level, we're talking about these things because this church cares about your soul. We care about what happens to you in eternity. We don't couple that with an appeal for money. We don't couple that with pressure to do this or that in the body. We separate out all of that stuff so that there would be as few hindrances as possible to you receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you should keep that in mind when I tell you that the Bible says that you do not meet the standard that God requires for you to go to heaven. You don't. None of us do. We're not perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect. The Bible says in Isaiah 53, "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way." Every one of us gone astray. Here's God, perfect, holy, Creator of heaven and earth, Creator of your soul, and you've wandered away, transgressed, trespassed, committed iniquity, full of sin. No way, absolutely no way for you to be with him. The Bible says, Romans 3 that, "None is righteous. No, not one. No

one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one."

Beloved, that is central to the gospel. What we read in 1 Corinthians, Christ died for our sins and so we can't bypass this or minimize this aspect of the sinfulness of man, which is another way of saying we cannot bypass your sinfulness, when we talk about the gospel, we cannot bypass your sinfulness when we answer the question are you a Christian or not because your guilt carries a death sentence with it. Ezekiel 18 verse 4 says, "The soul that sins must die." That's Old Testament, New Testament, Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." That means not only physical death, it includes it, but it also includes spiritual alienation and separation from God for all of eternity.

Beloved, do you believe that? Do you believe the gospel? Is your heart humbled to the extent that you can say, "Yes, that's true of me"? One of the most nauseating things to me about ministry, just broadly speaking, nationally speaking, is that unspoken but very present dynamic of people that are happy to condemn the sins of society, happy to condemn the sins of others, but carry no sense of personal conviction, sorrow, and repentance about their own sins. You're not going to stand before God and give an account for the sins of society, you're going to stand before God and give an account of your own sins if you're not a Christian. And what's going to happen to you then? It's very unusual even in the best of churches, and I came from a pretty good one in California, even in the best of churches, to find individuals who are more concerned about their own sin and guilt before God than they are complaining about the sins of the world around them. Let that sink in. God's not calling you to repent of the sins of the world. The gospel addresses you and says you are a sinner, you are under the power of sin, you are in a state of guilt and condemnation, and what about you? Well, "Yeah, but you know, you know, abortion." Okay, are you guilty of abortion? "Well, no." Okay, well then why are you raising that? Why are you deflecting the issue to talk about a societal sin, which is indeed very bad, but let's talk about your sin. Let's talk about your arrogance, your anger, your lusts, your rebellion against God, your prayerlessness, your indifference. Let's talk about that. "I don't want to talk about that." Why not? That's central to the gospel as it applies to you.

The sinfulness of man, the sinfulness of you. Turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 with me, and as you're turning there, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, if you have trouble finding it, it's right after 1 Thessalonians. As you're turning there, a preacher that does not allow you to evade the questions at hand is doing you a favor even if you resent it. Even if you take offense at an insistence on your own personal guilt and condemnation, the preacher who delivers that news to you is doing you a favor and not letting you evade and avoid the very central issue to your soul. The gospel is an offense. The truth of what Scripture says about all of us is an unavoidable offense against the pride of man but the fact that it offends is no reason to stay silent on the matter that is central to the gospel.

2 Thessalonians chapter 1 just to add a text to the assertion that all who die in their sins will suffer eternal death, the end of verse 7 talks about "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do

not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel," the gospel, "of our Lord Jesus Christ," the consequences of ignoring, rejecting, disobeying the gospel is that, "They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day." Christ will come in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God.

This is what the Bible says, beloved. In context of using the term gospel, it talks about the consequences of rejecting it, and so, my friend, my dear friend, the Bible comes to you, the gospel of Jesus Christ comes to you and says you are a lost sinner who needs salvation and deliverance from someone outside you, the question is whether you truly believe that or not. Do you believe the gospel or are you among the many that deflect, say, "I'm not that bad," even if you don't say it outwardly, you say it in your heart, "I know that's true of others, but I'm going to be okay." Or do you recognize that you are in a state of spiritual ruin, alone and on your own?

The sinfulness of man, the holiness of God, point number three, let's consider the work of Jesus Christ. The work of Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture and why the gospel is good news is that it offers a direction out of that miserable condition; it offers to all men everywhere, just as the command to repent goes to all men everywhere, the gospel goes to all men everywhere without exception and says that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost, Luke 19:10. Jesus said, "I have come to seek and to save that which is lost." The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that he came from heaven to earth in order to save men from their miserable condition of sinfulness. The eternal Son of God became man in order to identify with men and unlike every one of us, Christ lived a life of perfect righteousness. In Matthew 17 verse 5, God could say from heaven, looking down on Christ at the time of the transfiguration, he said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," an affirmation of the perfect, impeccable righteousness of Jesus Christ testified from heaven itself. Christ, though he be a man, was not like us in our sin. Born of a virgin, lived a perfect life, free from every taint of sin, and in God's saving plan, Jesus Christ as the great high priest and as the sacrifice himself offered himself up to God as a blood sacrifice to atone for the sins of people just like you. It's really stunning if you stop and let that sink in. The eternal Son of God, perfect in righteousness, offering himself as a bloody sacrifice once and for all for sinners who've rejected and rebelled and hate him? He's on the cross, I'm going back and forth here in the pulpit to reflect the back and forth in my mind. Here is this eternal Christ looking on those crucifying him and saying, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing."

Beloved, do you believe that? 1 Peter 3 says Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God, that that death of Christ was an act of reconciliation sent from heaven itself in order to take those bound in the sinfulness of mankind, bound in their own sin, and to reconcile them, to bring them out of that condition, out from under the slavery of sin and Satan, to be delivered from all of that and placed into his kingdom with all of their sins forgiven and accepted as righteous in the sight of God. Do you believe that? I mean, I'm earnestly asking you that question, do you believe that with all of your heart? Do you know that to be true with assurance because it

is revealed in the Holy word of God? Do you believe the gospel? This is the gospel of which we are speaking. We are in a high and holy moment of worship as we contemplate the gospel and what God has done to deliver sinners from their miserable condition.

So Christ stood in your place at the cross, he stood in the place of sinners, somewhat more accurately stated, and he absorbed the wrath of God. God poured out his wrath on Christ instead of pouring it out on those of his people and as a historical matter, Christ died on that cross. As a historical matter, he was buried in a grave. And as a historical matter, God raised him on the third day. Beloved, the tomb is empty and his resurrection proved that he had conquered sin and death so that the gospel gives us a message about how we can be justified before God, justification, that God pardons, forgives all of our sins, and accepts us as righteous when our faith is in Christ alone. The one who believes in Christ receives him unconditionally as Lord and Savior, the Bible says God accepts him as righteous, accepts her as completely forgiven, accepts us as though we had fully obeyed everything God ever required because he credits us with the righteousness of Christ. Christ in that perfect righteousness as a gift from God, we are counted as having lived the perfect righteousness, the perfect righteous life of Christ, and all of our sin credited to Christ at the cross where he paid for it and extinguished the wrath of God as he offered his eternal self up as a sacrifice on behalf of his people. The gospel says that. The gospel teaches that. Beloved, do you believe the gospel?

Well, fourthly, the gospel calls for a response. In Mark chapter 1 verse 15, we read, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Repent and believe in the gospel. And this is why we go back and say we're not just talking about some dry, esoteric, academic affirmation of certain facts and statements in the gospel. A saving response to Christ includes a heartfelt repentance from sin. Your sin. Not society's sins, yours. I can't emphasize that enough. You see, you benefit, partake in the gospel only when you confess your guilt and forsake any claim of being a good person, forsake any claim of your own merit, forsake any claim of good works. You see, in the gospel, God calls you to come as a beggar, as a spiritual beggar with no gifts of your own, no righteousness of your own to offer as your own. The Bible says clearly, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they and they alone will be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." See, there's this inner dynamic to the real you, who you are, in the center and core of your very personality that says, "I believe what Scripture says about the gospel, and I come to Christ without any claim of righteousness, 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress, Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.'"

Look at Mark chapter 8. Mark chapter 8, beginning in verse 34. Mark 8 verse 34, "calling the crowd to him with his disciples, Jesus said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" Complete self-denial, unreserved allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. "Lord, no matter where you lead me, I'll follow. I don't need to know in advance what that entails. As the eternal Son of God, the one crucified and risen for sinners, you are entitled to my complete absolute loyalty and

obedience no matter what and I give myself to you wholly and without reserve. I deny myself. I take up that instrument of death so that I can follow you."

Beloved, have you responded to Jesus Christ like that? You say, "Well, I don't want to do that." Well, Jesus addresses that attitude and excludes it from the kingdom. He says, verse 35, "For whoever would save his life will lose it," watch the end of this verse, "but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's," there it is again, that blessed word, "whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." So I ask you, beloved, do you believe the gospel? Have you repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ in this way of self-renunciation, in this manner of dying to self and giving yourself to Christ that Christ himself calls us to in Mark chapter 8? Have you believed the gospel of Jesus Christ like that?

Fifthly and finally, we've seen the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the work of Jesus Christ, the response of man, fifthly and finally, the promise of God. The promise of God. One way that you can know whether you have truly believed the gospel or not is whether you are resting in the promise of God that is given to everyone who truly believes, because the gospel comes with a promise of forgiveness and a promise of eternal life. And again, beloved, I just want to remind you of those words of Spurgeon, when we are engaged in the gospel, we are engaged talking about the gospel, this is a high act of worship that we're doing right now. We're not going through the motions here. We are earnest about the truth of God together and considering whether it has come with power to our own souls so that we might know that we are safe in that coming day of accountability.

The promise of God. You know, the whole thing about the gospel, give me just 30 extra seconds here, is that the gospel is an expression of the love of God for sinners. The fact that God has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to himself is a revelation of the fact that he is a gracious, loving, forgiving God of whom Scripture can say that he desires none to perish but for all to come to everlasting life. A God offended, a holy God, righteously, justly offended at the sin of man, has within his great essence these perfections of grace and love and mercy to provide a way of reconciliation for guilty sinners like each one of you. That's amazing. And so the gospel rooted in this love of God, "And greater love has no one than this, that he would lay down his life for his friends." You want a spouse that loves you? You want kids that love you? You want grandkids that love you? Fine, well and dandy but understand that there is no greater love to be found on earth than this eternal heavenly love by Christ who sacrificed himself, who gave himself up for sinners like you so that you, unworthy, could be reconciled to his most worthy self.

That's love. That's grace. That's overwhelming. That's why to hear the gospel rightly is an act of worship, because this gospel comes with a promise of forgiveness and eternal life. The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16 and listen to it in light of what we've

said this morning. "For God so loved the world," there's a breadth to his love to Jew and Gentile alike, a breadth to his love, to the ruined prostitute, to the moralist self-righteous, and all points in between. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Beloved, no one is a Christian without believing the gospel. Do you believe the holiness of God? Do you believe your own sinfulness? Do you believe in the work of Jesus Christ, the person and work of Jesus Christ? Have you repented and given yourself to him? Are you resting in the promise of God? Do you have this hope of eternal life?

No one is a Christian without believing the gospel and I hope that after today you look at those 14 questions and you say those things are paltry things to say in response to a great question like are you a Christian. These things and these self-righteous attainments that people want to talk about, how repulsive is that in light of the true gospel, of the true Christ truly laying down his life for sinners at a true cost to himself. Are you a Christian? The starting point to answer that is do you believe the gospel? Beloved, if you're willing to start there in answer to that question, we can get somewhere. If you're willing to start there, we can actually determine whether or not you are a Christian. There's a little more to consider that we're going to save for next week so be with us next Sunday.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we contemplate that great verse from the gospel of John, thank you for loving the world. Thank you for giving your only begotten Son. Thank you for the gift of repentance and faith that we must have if we are to be reconciled to you. Thank you for being a God gracious and willing to forgive all of our sins, to deliver us from judgment and hell, and to grant us the promising gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Father, you know that these things have come to us today in an earnest desire that everyone would be reconciled to you. We've sought, however meagerly, to adore you in a right consideration of the gospel. We pray now that by grace you would work in the hearts of each one as we soon depart. Father, life is short, it's fragile, let an urgency accompany our consideration of these things, that today is the day of salvation, today is the day to deal with these things. For the sake of Christ and in hope of the work of the Holy Spirit, we pray, amen.

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