

## The Gospel & The Church

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Let's start this week with the basics of Christianity, that is, the gospel. "Gospel" comes from a Greek word (the original language of the New Testament) that means "good news." One of the places that the gospel is summarized best is in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul writes, "Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you, which you received, on which you have taken your stand and by which you are being saved, if you hold to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..."

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, and thereby, into both you and me, by disobeying God and eating the fruit. This created a chasm between the holy God and the (now) sinful man, which resulted in death being brought into the world. Even all the way back in Genesis 3, God promised that a solution would come.

Jesus was that solution. He lived a sinless life but was nevertheless crucified, dying the death that we all deserve. His death and subsequent resurrection gave him victory over death, and he offers that victory to anyone who will repent of their sin and place their faith and hope in him. He will return to Earth one day to raise up those who have died and to vanquish evil forever.

I must mention that to reject Christ results in eternal condemnation. But we should rejoice in this - not that people are condemned, but that evil itself is condemned. A loving and just God could not let evil run rampant forever. We might grow impatient with the evil we see in the world, but we can have faith that the time is coming.

The Church was established at Pentecost in Acts 2. "The Church" can mean different things depending on the context. There is the capital C Church, meaning the worldwide church, i.e. all believers across the globe. It can also refer to the local church, whether that be LakeView, or the First Baptist, or the one on some corner in Atlanta. Though we often draw dividing lines because of the sin within us, there is no division of the church in God's eyes. Baptist churches, evangelical free churches, Lutheran churches, and non-denominational churches (assuming they are true biblical churches) are all part of the same team, although there are differences in which we all understand and apply God's Word.

What does it mean to believe the Gospel? What does it mean to be a part of the church? We could talk for hours about these questions. But the most simple, non-nuanced way to say it is to be continually moving towards Christ. What that looks like practically will be different in each individual's life. We will spend the next six weeks talking through the Six Fundamentals of being a Christian from Acts 2. However, don't think of being a disciple of Christ as a destination. There is no "you've made it" point of being a Christian. There are milestones and things we ought to accomplish as we live out our faith, but the most important thing is that we are moving towards Christ in every way.

A couple of questions to get the discussion going:

- How would you explain the gospel?
- What is your history with the church? Has it been a struggle or a joy? Do you not have experience with the church?
- How would you judge your own faith journey so far?