

Gospel Answers

The Gospel is the good news of our salvation: that we are no longer condemned by our sin, but forgiven through God's grace. Therefore, the Gospel provides the answer to our greatest need and question. Yet we have many other needs and questions. We desire answers to our pain, loneliness, shame, meaninglessness, and desire for justice. What about these questions? The Gospel is still the answer. It is the vastly better answer to our most fundamental questions and needs.

WEEK FIVE

The Gospel provides a better answer to meaninglessness

Message Passage: Ecclesiastes 1:1-9 & Philippians 3:2-9
Small Group Passage: Philippians 3:10-14

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

The Gospel is the good news of our salvation: that we are no longer condemned by our sin, but forgiven through God's grace. Therefore, the Gospel provides the answer to our greatest need and question. Our need for a savior and our question about our relationship to God. But the Gospel does not only change our eternity; it transforms every part of our lives. When we fully understand the Gospel, we see its fruit everywhere in our lives. We can understand and see the fruit of the Gospel in our lives by answering four simple questions.

1. Who is God?
2. What has he done?
3. Who am I because of what he has done?
4. How should I live my life because of who I am?

The problem is we do this completely backward more often than not.

1. What am I experiencing?
2. Based on my experience, what is true of me?
3. Based on what is true of me, what has God done?

4. Who is God?[1]

In doing so, we allow our experience to shape our view of ourselves, the Gospel, and of God. Rather than letting who God is and what Jesus has done shape how we see ourselves and the world around us.

Last week we saw how the feeling (experience) of shame leads us to get this order wrong. But shame is not the only emotion that does this. The overwhelming feeling of meaninglessness does much the same.

THE QUESTION

Ec 1:1-9 *The words of the Teacher, a son of David, king in Jerusalem:*

2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

3 What do people gain from all their labors
at which they toil under the sun?
4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
6 The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.
7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.
8 All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.
9 What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.

[1] Jeff Vanderstelt, Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 118-123

You would expect these words to come from a man at the end of his rope. Likely these closing words of a man who had failed at most, if not all, of his earthly endeavors. But that is not the case.

Solomon, King Solomon, wrote the entire book of Ecclesiastes. He ruled Israel at the height of its power, wealth, and size.

- He built the long-awaited temple in Jerusalem, the one his father, David, wanted to build (1 Kings 6).
- He amassed vast amounts of wealth (1 Kings 10:24-29).
- Established diplomatic peace with neighboring states (1 Kings 4:24).
- Became world-renowned for his wisdom
- Authored Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

If anyone in Scripture should have had a cheery outlook on life, it should have been Solomon. Yet he was anything but that. But this is not unique to Solomon. Today, it's almost a stereotype of a successful man or woman who seems to have it all yet feels empty. Despite the outward success, they feel meaningless. In moments of honesty, men and women ask themselves, and hopefully God, why life feels meaningless.

Regardless of the question or problem, Jesus is the answer.

THE GOSPEL ANSWER

Php 3:2-4 A *Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh.* ***3*** *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—****4*** *though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

The problem: Paul was warning the church in Philippi against a heretical teaching of the day that required obedience to the Levitical law for salvation. They believed salvation came through Jesus plus obedience to the law. As always, the "plus something" made it a false Gospel. This issue was part of broader conflict throughout Paul's ministry: certain teachers were insisting that Gentile believers could not be saved unless they underwent circumcision according to Mosaic custom. (Acts 15:1–29)

This heretical teaching is unfortunately alive and well today. However, I don't think many of us are tempted to rely on our obedience to the Law for our salvation. But that doesn't mean we don't rely on other things. You see, it is part of our human nature to want to be self-sufficient. To be able to say, "I am okay because _____," and fill in that blank with something we control.

For them it was I am okay because I obey the Levitical law. For us today, it may be "I am okay because I am a good person" or "I am okay because I am a successful, self-sufficient person." Whatever we fill that blank with, it fails. When it does, we feel afraid, alone, empty, and meaningless. Paul had come to the same realization.

Php 3:4b-6 *… If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:* ***5*** *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;* ***6*** *as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.*

Paul's religious resume as a faithful Jewish man was impeccable. In Jewish culture, Paul would have had high standing in society. If anyone could say, "I am okay because of my religious pedigree," it was Paul.

Php 3:7 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

That religious resume really meant something to him at one point. He likely tied his self-worth to it, since it was the foundation of his life and faith. But then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Once Paul came face to face with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the redeemer of the world, that religious resume seemed insignificant and meaningless, like Solomon's accomplishments, success, and riches in the political world.

Php 3:8 *What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ*

That prestigious religious resume was now considered garbage. The Gr. word can even be translated "dung" or "manure.[2]" Does that mean that Paul's religious education was evil or sinful? Not necessarily, although his persecution of the church was. Paul wasn't trying to demean his Jewish upbringing or education. But he was saying that compared to the "surpassing worth of knowing Christ," it was useless garbage. **Everything is garbage compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.**

Your career, accomplishments, reputation, friends, morality, or anything else does not compare to knowing Jesus. They don't compare when we put them in place of Jesus. **The feeling of meaninglessness often comes from looking to ourselves to accomplish what only Christ can do.**

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[2] John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1826.

Php 3:9 *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

The Gospel is Jesus + Nothing else = my salvation. I don't bring anything to the table. My righteousness did not help. It did not get me one inch closer to Jesus. My accomplishments, wealth, and success do not benefit the creator of the universe.

When we fully understand this, we see that our identity does not come from what we do, what we do for others, or even for God. Our identity must be rooted in what Christ has done for us. An identity that is built on anything else is meaningless.

Small Group Transition: Once our identity is rooted in what Christ has done for us rather than what we have done, we no longer have to strive to find meaning somewhere. Instead, we are free to strive to know Christ more. In doing so, we find that meaning is not rooted in making much of ourselves, but in making much of our Savior, Jesus.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Solomon did not find meaning in his earthly success as a king. Paul did not find meaning in his religious resume as a Jewish scholar. What are some misplaced things that people today commonly try to find ultimate meaning and purpose in?

2. Why is it so tempting to build our identity around things we can accomplish and control rather than what Christ has done for us? What makes those things and our control of them so appealing?

   Read: Philippians 3:10-14

3. Vs 11. When Paul said he wanted to “know Christ”, he wasn't referring to when he first believed in Christ and was justified. Instead, Paul meant that, as a believer, he wanted to know Christ more fully and personally. He wanted to grow in his relationship with Christ. What regular rhythms are you keeping in your life to know Christ more day by day, like Paul is talking about here?

4. Before Paul came to know Christ, he was driven and zealous. The problem was that his zeal was focused on persecuting the church and self-righteous obedience to the

law. But when he met Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, everything changed. Paul's drive and zeal now turned toward knowing Christ more and making him known. How has coming to know Christ changed you? Have you found that what you strive for and what you find meaning in has changed as it did for Paul?

5. Vs 12-13 "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal.*" The Apostle Paul, author of two-thirds of the New Testament, had not yet arrived in his faith. This means he believed he still had room to grow in knowing and imitating Christ. Why is this such good news?

   Leader Note: When it comes to spiritual maturity, we never arrive. We always have room to grow in godliness and Christlikeness. Also, the task of making disciples is never quite finished, at least not until King Jesus says it is (1 Cor 15:52). Because of this, we will never grow tired of doing what Christ Jesus has called us to do. The joy-filled work is not done until he calls us home.

6. Vs 14. Paul's goal was knowing Christ more. His finish line was eternal: heaven. How is this race and finish line inherently better than the race and finish line others choose?

   Leader Note: Many people struggle with feelings of meaninglessness because the focus of their life, whether it be career success, fame, or many other things, did not provide what they ultimately hoped it would: meaning. They ran their self-prescribed race well, but at the finish line, they are left wanting more. I have never found anyone who has said this about Jesus. The race that he has set out before us is the only one worth running (Heb 12:1-2). One day, when our race is finished, and we are called home to be with Jesus, we will know him fully as we see him face to face (1 Cor 13:12). The finish line does not disappoint.

7. What is one area of your life where you are tempted to find meaning or worth apart from Christ? What would it look like this week to let the truth of the Gospel reshape how you view that area?

PRAYER TIME

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