

The Simplicity of the Gospel

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Sunday, 11 May 2008

When we think of things that are great, things that inspire us and take our breath away, we usually think of things that are fairly complicated. Harnessing the power of nuclear fission to create energy, for example, is something that is quite complex and difficult to understand. The first people able to do so have become heroes of modern science. Becoming the first people to ever fly an airplane catapulted a couple of bicycle repairmen to worldwide fame and cemented their place in world history. We laud and celebrate the names of those who achieve great things, and, as a result, we tend to think just because something is complicated and difficult that it is really important. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the most important information ever given to us, is relatively simple. Simplicity is part of the beauty of the gospel. Because it is simple, the gospel is something that nearly everyone can understand. If it were overly complicated, then only those who were able to figure it out could be saved. Yet, when you compare the simplicity of the gospel to all of the religions that have been created by mankind there is none that approaches the elegant simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This simplicity has caused it to be called foolishness by those seeking worldly wisdom, and it has been called weakness by those in search of religious complexity. But to Christians, the gospel of Jesus Christ, in all its glorious simplicity, is both the wisdom of God and the power of God for the salvation to all who believe (1 Corinthians 1.24). It is the wisdom of God because it does what no other religious system in the history of the world has been able to do: it makes all people the same. Unlike the Old Testament, there is no distinction made between Jew and Gentile, but anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10.13). The repentance that leads to life has been granted to all people through the gospel the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 11.18). Unlike many forms of Grecian and Roman religion, one's efforts are not the basis for salvation. Those who are stronger, faster and better are not able to draw closer to God because Jehovah has chosen to save us through grace and mercy, not works (Ephesians 2.8-9). God has leveled the playing field because all have sinned and fallen short of his glory, and, since everyone has been shut up under sin, grace may be offered to all mankind (Romans 3.23, Romans 11.32). The gospel is the power of God because through it he is able to accomplish what we could never achieve: the forgiveness of sin. The only offerings ever accepted by God for sin were those things that could be offered without blemish or defect (cf. Leviticus 4.3, 23). This creates a problem for mankind because, as it is written, "Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 53.3). Since corrupt literally means "polluted, blemished or defective", then there is not a single person who could offer, or be offered as, an acceptable sacrifice for sin. Where we are weak and powerless God is mighty and powerful for with God all things are possible (Matthew 19.25-26). Jesus Christ lived in the weakness of the flesh and was tempted in every way that we are, yet he was without sin (Hebrews 4.15). This enabled him to offer for all time a single sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10.12). All of these things being true, what is the gospel? If it is the power of God and the wisdom of God, what exactly is meant by the gospel of Jesus Christ? If we look at the preaching of the first century, we are given those exact things. According to Peter, Jesus Christ is a man attested to by God through mighty works and signs who was delivered over to lawless men and killed. Though he died, and was buried, God raised him from the dead. By this, God declared that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2.22-24, 36). According to Paul, Christ died for our sins, was buried and was raised, all in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15.3-4). Both Paul and Peter state that God has chosen Jesus to judge the living and the dead in righteousness (Acts 10.42, 17.31). These are the basic elements of the gospel, and these things ought to cause us to turn from wickedness and unrighteousness to a living God that will forgive everyone who believes in Jesus Christ (Acts 10.43). Is this too simple? Not complicated enough? This is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This is the simple message that can turn someone from the path of perdition to the road of righteousness. This is the message which must be proclaimed to the entire world, and those who believe the message will submit to Jesus as their king and obey his commandments (Mark 16.16).