



SPECIAL LESSON: “JESUS SAVED ME – NOW I HAVE SOME QUESTIONS, PART 1”

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Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- We are in a new study series on **1 and 2 Thessalonians**, subtitled, ***‘Faithful Endurance in One Direction.’***
- To date, we’ve worked our way through the first chapter of **1 Thessalonians**, and we’ve seen that Paul is very thankful for this new body of believers.
- It was a modest-sized group. They are described in **Acts 17:4** as being, *“Some of the Jews....and a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.”*

NOTE: So, they were a diverse church. In terms of culture and gender, they were a sampling of those around them - and by their close fellowship, they broke the social standards of the day. And we’ve learned that this body of believers was exceptional in their faith. They were not like other churches Paul had planted that ‘had their problems and issues.’

NOTE: As our lessons in this new series have shown, Paul was confident that these new Thessalonians Christians were truly saved. We’ve learned why he felt as he did:

1. **First**, they had a right RESPONSE to the Gospel:
 - The Gospel came to them *‘with power’* – it showed it was divinely energized.
 - The Gospel came *‘with the Holy Spirit’* – their hearts received it the right way.
 - The Gospel came *‘with deep conviction’* – they were convicted about their sin.
2. **Second**, they showed the right RESULTS as new believers:
 - They *became imitators of Paul and of the Lord* – it was a sign of effective discipleship. They were duplicated ‘in Christ.’
 - They also *‘welcomed the message with joy despite severe suffering’* – they had a Godly posture to trials, setbacks, discouragements, and persecution.
 - They became *‘models’* or *‘examples’* of faith to other believers.
3. **Third**, they quickly developed the right REPUTATION among others:

- They were courageous in HOW they were proclaiming – they were bold with the Gospel.
- They were clear in WHO they had placed their faith – they had placed their faith and trust ‘in God’ and that was known to others around them.
- They were consistent in WHAT they were doing – they didn’t just talk about a holy life; they lived it continuously.
- They were committed to WHERE they were going – they had ‘turned to God from idols.’ They did an about-face, and they stayed on the right course.
- They were comforted by WHO they knew was coming – they lived in the expectation of Jesus Christ’s imminent return.

NOTE: This first chapter of **1 Thessalonians** is rich in showing what a life of TRUE faith looks like. It’s why Paul, in **vs. 4** of this chapter, confidently says to this new body of believers, “(God) has chosen you.” He could see it for himself.

NOTE: The bottom line in all this is **real** faith shows up. It’s not passive or ‘kept under wraps.’ It is instead alive, vibrant, obvious, and impactful. It changes us – and it changes others.

NOTE: These first five lessons in the book of **1 Thessalonians** have been a ‘reality check’ for many of us – I include myself in that group.

1. We privately wonder if our own lives show the same kind of qualities that the lives of these new Thessalonian believers showed.
 - It seems like they set a high bar, and we wonder if we can also reach that.
 - It’s easy to become preoccupied with our failures – with our own struggles in this journey of faith. For many of us, we want to ‘throw in the towel’ too quickly.
 - The truth is the Christian life is a constant battle to do the right thing, to be the right example, and to ‘faithfully endure in one direction.’
2. For some of us, these kinds of issues are not rare – they are common. We may even feel we’re constantly wrestling with defeat, doubt, and despair.
 - Related to the things we’ve studied in this series so far, some natural questions arise. These are ‘close cousin’ issues to the things we’ve learned.
 - I want to take **two** lessons here to deal with these matters. These are ‘special lessons’ which I am calling “**Jesus Saved Me – Now I Have Some Questions.**”
 - In these two ‘special lessons,’ I want to tackle FIVE important questions. I think it’s safe to say we’ve all wondered about these things from time to time.
3. The FIVE questions I want to unpack in these ‘special lessons’ - are the following:
 - How should we properly define the Gospel?
 - Does God choose us, or do we choose Him?
 - Do we have eternal security as Christians?
 - Why do we struggle with doubts about our salvation?
 - What can we know about the issue of ‘backsliding?’

NOTE: Let's just jump right in with the first of those five questions (this will be the only question of these five I will tackle today):

A. "How should we properly define the Gospel?"

NOTE: This is a VERY important question. We need to come away from answering it with a clear understanding.

1. This issue of properly defining the Gospel is probably the most important question of these five. **But admittedly...**

- It's hard to know what the 'Gospel' is when churches do not responsibly handle God's Word, or when they have an agenda with various topics or trends - - but then they **still** say they are 'about the Gospel.'
- It's confusing when we hear what is stated to be a 'Gospel-based sermon' when it has nothing to do with what the Bible is ACTUALLY saying.
- It's alarming to see pastors tolerate – and promote - a woke agenda, because they personally feel this shows 'the love of the Gospel.'
- In preparing this lesson, I glanced at the websites of a few regional churches. I found some claiming they are about 'the Gospel,' but...
 - They have female pastors,
 - They have a rainbow icon, and they say they are 'inclusive,'
 - They specify that they want 'no dogma or doctrine,'
 - They push 'the gift of tongues and apostolic prophecies,'
 - They say they want to emphasize 'peace, love, and harmony' and...
 - They take the position that there is 'no difference between Israel and the church.'
- Let me be clear: these are NOT churches that are about 'the Gospel' – much as they might choose to brand themselves that way. **Why do I say that?**

2. That's because the Gospel, **broadly speaking**, is the responsible declaration, accurate interpretation, and proper implementation of the FULL counsel of God's Word.

NOTE: Let's start here. Let's go with this 'broad brush' definition first.

- In this larger definition, the term 'Gospel' – in its greater sense – requires us to treat the **entire** Bible as God meant it to be treated.
- That means we must recognize Scripture as being the infallible, complete, eternal, and authoritative revelation FROM God TO us.
- That ALSO means we must subordinate ourselves to it. And that means we must accept the fact that the Scriptures are MEANT to be understood.
- God's Word **intends** to change lives. It is supernaturally enabled to do that.
- It is divinely inspired, and so if it is properly taught, it confronts us in our darkest corners and it brings us into the light of eternal truth.

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

- This is what happens when the full ‘Gospel’ is taught. And that requires us to read the Bible normally and interpret it literally – allowing for obvious figures of speech where they are used. This is common sense.
- Any efforts to force the Bible to say what we **want** it to say are wrong! This just shows we have a wrong perspective of God too.
- Any view on any matter that fails to take into **proper** account **all** passages Scripture provides on that topic runs the risk of being a wrong view.

NOTE: The bottom line is postures which willfully stray away from (or refuse to yield to) the Bible’s instructions disqualify an individual or a church from being ‘Gospel-centered.’

- You cannot disrespect God’s Word – and **still** claim you are something that your choices **CLEARLY** show you are **not**.
- All other doctrines, theories, positions, and details of Scripture are – in the end - outgrowths of the broad message of ‘the Gospel.’
- They all need to be preached and received in proper proportion and responsibility. If they are not handled this way, the risks are obvious.
- Again ‘the Gospel,’ in its broadest definition, is the responsible declaration and accurate interpretation of the **FULL** counsel of God’s Word.
- Because many people and churches fail to do this, then by the Bible’s standards, they do not really qualify as being ‘Gospel-oriented.’

NOTE: Here is something very important: the ‘Gospel’ protects us. In this broad definition, ‘the Gospel’ – **when it is properly taught** - is the greatest remedy against apostasy (which is ‘a departure away from faith and truth’).

- a. As we previously learned in our series in Jude, certain men had crept into the church unawares.
 - A threat had entered the church, not from the **outside**, but from the **inside**.
 - Apostasy – again, ‘a departure from the truth’ – had invaded.
 - Men who were **NOT** genuine ‘servants,’ who were **NOT** genuine ‘slaves of Christ,’ who did **NOT** have the spiritual welfare of others at heart as they claimed to have, and who were **NOT** truly gifted in the things they were doing, had lowered the bar and asserted their personal agenda.
 - They were willfully abandoning God’s truth. They refused to responsibly teach the broad ‘Gospel.’
- b. This is happening with great frequency in the church today where leaders are:
 - Suppressing clear doctrine – *this avoids the truth*.

- Elevating prescriptive and shallow ‘worship,’ – *this distracts from the truth.*
- Substituting sound teaching with politically-correct clichés – *this sugarcoats and dilutes the truth.*
- Disagreeing with the plain statements of Scripture – *this fights against the truth.*

These are ALL symptoms of apostasy. These are all indications that these kinds of churches are NOT ‘Gospel-centered’ the way they think they are.

3. Everything I’ve said to this point is about the **broad view** of ‘the Gospel.’ It all deals with the larger concept of properly being ‘Gospel centered.’

NOTE: Now, more **narrowly speaking**, the Gospel is the good news concerning Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. It’s the message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, that He rose again, and that He is the only way to eternal life.

Let me take a running start into this because this will be a deep dive...

- The word “Gospel” literally means “good news,” and it occurs 93 times in the Bible, specifically within the NT.
 - It comes from a Greek term through which we get our English words “*evangelist*” and “*evangelical*.”
 - While the Gospel, **broadly speaking**, is the whole counsel of Scripture responsibly taught and presented, the more specific focus of the Gospel is the “good news” concerning Jesus Christ and the way of salvation.

1. But here is a very important fact to consider, for the Gospel to be “good news,” we must know WHY it is “good news.” And to know that – we must **first** know and understand the “bad news” (put on your seat belts; I need to be blunt and clear):

- Many things in life have two sides: they have both good news and bad news associated with them.
- The **entire** truth of those things is a collective view of **both** sides.
- Emphasizing one side of the equation to the exclusion of the other side stops short of providing the WHOLE truth.
- This half-truth approach can have the same results as full deception. It happens all the time as we’ve observed.
- This same principle applies to the Gospel. There are great consequences to a shoddy or partial declaration of the Gospel.
- That’s why Paul says in **Galatians 1:7-8** that it’s:

*“...not even a gospel. (He says) Evidently some people are troubling you and trying to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel **other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!**”*

2. The bad news is we are all sinners, and we are destined for hell as a result.

Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.”

- ✓ The bad news is we are ALL born into sin, and we are ALL cursed with that condition.
 - ✓ **(Cf. Psalms 51:5)** – “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”
 - ✓ There is nothing we can do to change this situation we are born into. And it gets worse - - our sin dooms us to hell. That’s Part 1 of the bad news.
- Part 2 of the bad news is our sinful condition sets us up to be adversarial against a Holy God.
- ✓ **(Cf. familiar verse in Romans 3:23):**
 - “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
 - Our sin **keeps us** from a right relationship with God and from eternal life.
 - ✓ No one can EARN their way into the presence of God because the Bible says there is “no one righteous, not even one” in **Romans 3:10**.
 - ✓ No matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, no matter what rituals we attempt to keep, no matter what habits we form or get rid of, the Bible plainly says in **Isaiah 64:6** that all our best human efforts to please God are “as filthy rags.”
- Again - - this is the bad news. We are born into a doomed condition and there’s nothing we can do to change that - - nothing we can do to save ourselves.
- ✓ It’s not until we fully understand the bad news that we can fully appreciate and receive the good news.
 - ✓ As one commentator puts it, “You would not appreciate a stranger bursting into your home and dragging you outside, unless you first understood that your house was on fire.”
 - ✓ Until we understand that we are destined for eternal hell because of our sin, we cannot appreciate a way out of this dire situation.
3. And that brings us to “the good news.” That brings us to the core truth – this narrower definition of - “the Gospel.”
- The good news is that God loves us, and He **doesn’t want us** to be doomed to hell.
 - The good news is He has provided a way out of this fate that we are born into.

(Cf. John 3:16–18; reading more than just vs. 16 here) – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

- ✓ Here we see we have an alternative. We have an escape option.
- ✓ Here we are reminded that God loves us.
- ✓ Here we are reminded that we don't **have to** perish in hell.
- ✓ Here we are reminded that we can gain eternal life instead.
- ✓ Here we are reminded that we have a choice we need to make.
- ✓ And, here we are reminded that “believing in Jesus Christ” is the right choice. This saves us from our condemnation.

4. Teachers and pastors and anyone who focuses only on a watered-down version of the good news of the Gospel are not providing the full picture.

NOTE: How can you fully appreciate being dragged out of your house if you don't know it's already on fire?

- A vital part of God's plan of salvation, is knowing our fate by our sinful condition. It's knowing **where** we are headed if something doesn't change.
- And that's why we need to repent. When John the Baptist was calling people into a right relationship with God, he said, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*” (Cf. **Matthew 3:2**)

NOTE: I've asked this question before, but it's important and I need to ask it again: What does it mean to repent, and why is repentance important with the Gospel?

1. The literal meaning of 'repent' is to turn 180 degrees away from something. And spiritually speaking, the term *repentance* therefore implies “turning away from sin.”
 - True spiritual repentance includes the fact that we regret our sin, and we turn from it.
 - But a more precise meaning of “repent” in the Bible also means “to change one's mind.”
 - This sort of true repentance – according to the Bible - will result in a change of actions. It will show results. **Luke 3:8** says, “*Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.*”
 - In summarizing his own ministry in **Acts 26;20**, Paul states, “*I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.*”
 - So, the 'cliff notes' definition of Biblical repentance is, “A change of mind concerning one's sin, and concerning Jesus Christ, that results in a change of action.”
2. Repentance requires that we recognize we've thought wrongly in the past, and we're determined to think rightly in the future.

- A repentant person has “second thoughts” about their mindset or about things they formerly embraced.
- Replacing those old patterns are new ways of thinking about God, about sin, about holiness, and about doing what God wants us to do.
- True repentance is always marked by “Godly sorrow.” It is grief over one’s personal condition, and according to the Bible, it is this sort of repentance that “*leads to salvation.*”
 - ✓ **2 Cor. 7:10** tells us, “*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret...*”

NOTE: Perhaps you are wondering, “What about faith?” How does that factor into this ‘repentance’ issue?

- Repentance and faith can be understood as two sides of the same coin.
 - ✓ We’ve already seen that fully believing in and trusting in Jesus Christ is essential for salvation. That’s the essence of faith.
 - ✓ But - one cannot place their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior without **FIRST** changing their mind about their own sinful condition, and about who Jesus Christ is and what He has done.
 - ✓ Put another way, Biblical repentance, insofar as salvation is concerned, is changing your mind from a position that rejects Jesus Christ to a position that places full faith in Jesus Christ.

3. **IMPORTANT:** Repentance is **not** any kind of work we can do to earn salvation! (Reminder: there is **NO** work and **NO** action we can do to earn salvation!)

- This gets back to repentance - **no one** can repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ unless God **sovereignly** pulls that person to Himself.
 - ✓ **(Cf. John 6:44)** – “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws** him.*”
 - ✓ The bottom line is repentance is something God gives us the ability to exercise. It is only possible to exercise repentance because of His grace – His unmerited favor to us.

NOTE: When Peter was explaining his ministry to the Gentiles, it says in **Acts 11:18** that the Jewish believers then remarked, “*So then, **God has granted** even the Gentiles repentance unto life.*” God granted grace to them for their repentance!

- ✓ So, no one can repent unless God grants that repentance. All of the salvation process, including repentance and faith, is a result of God drawing us to Himself, the result of Him opening our eyes, and the result of Him changing our hearts.
- ✓ So again – repentance is **NOT** a work that **WE DO** to earn salvation. It is the result of what God does **IN** us.

NOTE: So, again, coming somewhat ‘full circle’ here – let’s look a bit more at this ‘good news’ element once again.

1. It’s tempting to think, from a human perspective, that we can look at our ‘relative goodness’ or ‘relative badness.’ I’m better than so-and-so, or so-and-so is much worse than me.
 - But as we’ve learned from God’s Word, despite our relative “goodness” or “badness,” we are all in the same spiritual boat.
 - The Bible says we have all sinned, and the punishment for sin is death (eternal separation from God, eternal condemnation, eternal hell).
 - For this situation to be remedied, in order for us to not go to hell but to heaven instead, our sin must be somehow **removed** or **paid for**.
 - **Hebrews 9:22** says, “*Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.*”
 - The OT Law established the fact that cleansing from sin can only happen through the sacrifice of an innocent life.

2. That’s why the central component of the good news of the Gospel is Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. This was the final sin offering that fulfilled the Law’s righteous requirement, and it fully paid the penalty for our sin.
 - **(Hebrews 10:10)** – “*And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all.***”
 - ✓ **Takeaway #1** – we are ‘sanctified’ – we are set apart as ‘holy’ – because of Jesus Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross.
 - ✓ **Takeaway #2** – this only needed to happen once, and it provided the payment for sin for ALL who believe and receive this gift
 - **Then, two vss. later: (Cf. Hebrews 10:12)** - “*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,*”
 - ✓ **Takeaway #1** – It’s done! Nothing more needs to be done for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was final.
 - ✓ **Takeaway #2** – the good news is this: payment is complete!
 - The good news of the Gospel also involves Jesus Christ’s bodily resurrection on the third day.
 - ✓ **Romans 4:25** says, “*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*”
 - ✓ By “justification,” that means we can be declared to be righteous.
 - ✓ Justification is an act of God. It’s that process whereby God pronounces a sinner to be righteous.
 - ✓ And that happens because that sinner has fully placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ.

3. So, putting this all together, we see that receiving salvation – or “becoming saved” – requires several elements of the Gospel to play a part:
 - **These are all mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:3–6** - “*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that (1.) **Christ died** (2.) **for our***

*sins according to the Scriptures, that (3.) **he was buried**, that (4.) **he was raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures”*

- **Romans 10:9** distills these elements down even more simply – “If you declare with your mouth, (1.) **“Jesus is Lord,”** and (2.) **believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead**, you (3.) **will be saved.**”

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. This might be the last time you hear this. None of us can control what may happen to us. The Gospel is the very good news that resolves the very bad news.
2. That very good news means we can be rescued from the penalty of our sin. That very good news, according to **Romans 8:1** is the fact that “*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*”
3. That also means that to reject the Gospel means to choose the bad news. Those that end up condemned before God are in that situation because of THEIR choices, THEIR lack of faith in Jesus Christ, and THEIR refusal to embrace the good news.
4. They get to that point because they have rejected Jesus Christ - - and the Bible says very clearly that Jesus Christ is God’s ONLY provision for salvation.
5. Remember what **John 3:16-18** said, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*”

NEXT TIME: We’ll unpack the other four questions: “Does God choose us, or do we choose Him?” “Do we have eternal security as Christians?” “Why do we struggle with doubts about our salvation?” (and) “What can we know about the issue of ‘backsliding?’”



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The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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