

Gospel and Human Misery

Outline

1. Human Misery
2. Cause of Human Misery
3. Gospel that saves you
4. Gospel that sets you free versus advice that puts burdens
5. Gospel Decisions
6. Gospel and Repentance

1. Human Misery

- a. Despite enormous advances in science, disorder, misery, and death reign today and have been reigning throughout human history.
- b. Everyone, throughout history, seems to have more or less the same standards of right and wrong. It appears to be written in our hearts, and we call it conscience. When we put it down in writing, we may call it religion, and those that taught religion are religious leaders. Most religious leaders are well-meaning people.
- c. Although everyone knows right and wrong, everyone seems to do some wrong virtually every day, even from childhood, despite being brought up by well-meaning parents. We call the wrong behaviour — a sin. We observe everyone's sins, even from birth, so everyone is born a sinner. Even well-meaning religious leaders are born sinners and also sin.
- d. Taken together, the sins of the world cause disorder and misery throughout human history. There seems to be no remedy for disorder and human misery because everyone is born a sinner and sins. No religious leader can change this situation.

2. Cause of Human Misery

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (*Gen 1:1*), and He created man and woman in His image and likeness (*Gen 1:27, 5:1*). He blessed them, telling them to multiply, rule and subdue the earth (*Gen 1:28-30*). Being in God's image and likeness, humans were in a perfect relationship with God. But Satan (a rebellious fallen angel) tempted them to rebel against God, which they did and **fell out of the relationship with God** — known as the Fall of Man. God warned Adam that if they disobeyed Him, they would die. Since then, the generations that followed were born in the likeness and image of Adam (*Gen 5:3*) — a fractured image of God because of sin. Sin can be defined as self-centeredness and not God-centered. Because of our self-centeredness, we break God's law and sin against God. Henceforth, humans were born sinners and kept sinning, resulting in disorder, misery, and death. Humanity now has three giant enemies— sin, Satan and death. **Creation is now perishing. No religious leader can stop it. Only the Creator Himself must intervene.**

A preacher once said, "Jesus is the answer". A young man asked, "But what is the question?" The preacher replied, "Who can save us from human misery in this perishing world ruled by sin, death and Satan? That's

the question”, said the preacher. And then he said again to the young man, “Jesus is the answer”.

3. Gospel that saves you.

The word **gospel** comes from the Greek word “Evangelion”, meaning “good news”, which in old English is “god-spell” that eventually became “gospel”. In secular Greek, “Evangelion” was a powerful word to mean an important and good announcement from the Emperor of Rome, e.g. the birth of his son or the crowning of a new emperor. And a herald would loudly proclaim it on the streets of Roman cities. But the New Testament writers used this word as the **excellent announcement or news**, not from an earthly emperor, but from God — a powerful announcement!

The Gospel is **Good News** that the Eternal Creator God Himself has intervened to save humanity from a perishing world.

God becomes 100% man without ceasing to be 100% God. He came into the womb of a virgin (Mary) so that He was not born of Adam’s seed. His name is **Jesus**. Not being born of Adam, Jesus was not born a sinner. Jesus came:

- a. To rescue humanity from this perpetual misery and this perishing world.
- b. To create an eternal new creation that will not perish, and He invites everyone to join.
- c. To die and pay the penalty for all humanity’s sins. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead. Jesus gave believers in Him a new heart and a new spirit to have a harmonious relationship with God—with love, joy and peace.
- d. To defeat the three enemies of humanity—sin, Satan, and death. On the cross, Jesus paid our penalty for sin, so we are no longer under condemnation and thus disarmed Satan’s power over believers. Jesus rose from the dead, defeating death. Those who believe in Him will also rise from the dead.
- e. To reveal the Father-Heart of God and His values to humanity
- f. To give us a new heart and a new spirit, to live out the values of God.

4. Gospel that sets you free versus advice that puts burdens

Every religious leader gives good advice and teaches how to find God. Only Jesus says I AM God, and I came to rescue you (Luke 19:10)

Good advice sounds good, but it is powerless to make you obey because of our sinful hearts. **Good advice puts burdens and condemns you for your inability to obey.** All good advice, however religious, cannot rescue humanity from a perishing world under sin, Satan and death.

The gospel is not good religious advice. Gospel is the good news that Jesus lived for you the life you couldn’t live. And Jesus paid the penalty you deserved to pay, so you don’t have to pay. This way, the gospel takes away burdens of condemnation. You are free.

5. Gospel Decisions

News is not religion. News is not a set of rules to obey. But the news is an announcement of something that has already occurred. And all we can do with news is respond to it by believing it or rejecting it. Those who believe the good news (gospel) will be part of God’s new creation and will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, 5:24)—see points (a) to (f) above. Those who do not believe in the good news prefer to remain in a powerless, perishing world — they stand condemned already (John 3:17-18). They will perish eternally.

The Offense of the Gospel

Now, the gospel, even though very good and the best news, yet will offend people. The Bible says that all human behaviour (whether respectable, questionable, or unrespectable) is unacceptable and falls short of God's standards — causing misery, disorder, and death (point 1 above). We all need God's intervention in Jesus Christ, who came to save us. Putting all humanity and all human behaviour in one big bag and calling it "not good for God" is offensive, and further saying that Jesus Christ is the only answer by God to save us is also harsh. We must present the gospel the best we can, with the truth told in love, yet the gospel will offend many people. If we are not prepared to face the offence caused by preaching the gospel, our message will not be the gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. Gospel and Repentance

Mark 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news."

What is the connection between the good news (gospel) and repentance? Are we not saved by faith alone? To answer these questions, we must first understand "repentance" — which means "turn from the path you are taking" — of being independent and trusting Jesus. So, the faith that saves you is repentant faith.

In his book, "War of the Jews", the Jewish historian Josephus (37-100 AD) mentions when he was a commander of the Jewish forces that fought against the Roman occupation of Palestine. But he eventually persuaded his Jewish troops to "repent" and surrender to Rome in 67 AD. And what he meant by repent was that the Jewish forces should *turn from their path* against Rome and submit to Rome because Rome was much stronger. Josephus wrote his book in Greek during the same period that Mark wrote his gospel, closely after 70 AD. The Greek word (*metanoia*) used for repent was also the same. So, Mark's Gospel meant the same: turn from the path of rebelling against God and surrender to Him. But God is not oppressive like Rome. God is good, slow to anger, and abounding in love. He sent His son Jesus to become man and pay for humanity's rebellion against Him. Therefore, repent of your ways, believe in the good news of Jesus and rest in what God has done for you — rest in His embrace. And God will give you a new heart and a new spirit to enable you to follow His ways out of love for Him.

Let me give you the testimony of a very successful English businessman with whom I had the privilege to associate for several years. He and his wife attended the Alpha Seminar led by Nicky Gumbel, pastor of Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London. After Nicky preached the gospel, he invited the Holy Spirit and suddenly, the gospel truth became clear to this businessman. He began moving his arm vigorously up and down, slapping the table he was sitting at, exclaiming, "*That's it, that's it, that's it...*!" He now knew Jesus was most important to him, and at that instant, he embraced Jesus wholeheartedly, turning away from whatever was important to him in the past.

Often, we associate repentance with godly sorrow for sins. 2 Cor 7:10 "*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation*", which means when we are genuinely sorry for our sins, it must "turn us from the path we are taking" and turn to Jesus.

- Some people cry profusely for their sins and turn to Jesus. A close friend of mine cried for two days in sorrow for his sins as he turned to Jesus. He did this out of deeply recognising that he was rebelling against a holy and wonderful God.
- Some people fear God, turn to Him and embrace His gospel. I was such a person. I battled for three years, rebelling against the promptings in my heart before I surrendered and turned to God and embraced the gospel.
- Some people, like the English businessman above, just saw the truth of Jesus and instantly turned to Him wholeheartedly.
- Some people gradually see the truth of Jesus and turn to Him with no dramatic experience. Yet, at some stage, they submitted their lives to Jesus.

Now, repentance is not the same as the gospel. People may repent of their wrongway of life and then turn and reform as some alcoholics do. But if they don't turn to Jesus on His terms to save them from this perishing world, they will not transform into a new creation—they won't have a new heart and a new spirit.

If people say they believe the good news (gospel), they must also relinquish their old ways and follow God on His terms — they must repent. Such repentance would involve avoiding ungodly cultural and personal practices, which may take some time. But repentance and believing the good news must go side by side and hand in hand. Not one without the other. In all cases, repentance and revelation of the gospel come from the Holy Spirit, who transforms us into a new creation. He cleanses our hearts from defilement and gives us a new heart and a new spirit that joyfully obeys God out of love for Him.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.