

What is the Gospel? — Its Apostolic Foundation

Outline

1. What is the meaning of the word "gospel"?
2. The gospel is given in Galatians 1:1-5, 8-12
 - (a) Paul's divinely appointed authority
 - (b) What is the gospel?
 - (c) How did Jesus rescue us?

1. What is the meaning of the word "gospel"? The word "gospel" means "good news". Gospel does not mean good advice that a person can accept fully, partially, or even reject. Advice is something you give for the future. But the news is about an event that has already taken place, which you can believe or don't believe. There were no newspapers in the olden days. So, a person would shout the news on the streets. "**Good news**" came from the king, like when he ascended the throne or was victorious over his enemies. Under the king's orders, notable runners would proclaim it throughout his empire. In the Bible, the same word, "**good news**" (**gospel**), **refers to the good news from God—the King of kings.**

What is the good news? God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to **rescue** us from human misery caused by our three enemies—sin, Satan and death. And to introduce His Kingdom (rule) on earth by defeating sin, Satan and death that ruled over us. When Jesus comes again, He will ultimately establish His kingdom throughout the world as in heaven. There will be a new creation (Rev 21:1-5)

2. The gospel given in Galatians 1:1-5, 8-12 *Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brothers and sisters with me. To the churches in Galatia: ³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen... 8 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! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying*

to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; instead, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

In the above scripture, we will examine (a) Paul's apostolic authority, (b) what is the gospel, and (c) how did Jesus rescue us.

(a) Paul's Divinely Appointed Apostolic Authority: Paul uses strong language in Gal 1:8-9 to preserve the gospel's truth. How could he say that? Because God appointed Paul to be an Apostle with apostolic authority. Apostles are ministers who are "sent". There were many apostles in the New Testament. But **God-appointed special apostles** had four distinguishing marks:

Jesus personally appointed them.

Jesus personally sent them.

Jesus personally taught them the gospel.

They all witnessed the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Paul had all four (Gal 1:11-12, Acts 9:1-19), and so did the 12 Apostles. They have God-appointed, Holy Spirit-led, **apostolic authority** to write such truth.

Paul uses strong language (Gal 1:8-9) because the gospel did not come from man but came from Jesus, who directly revealed it to Paul (Galatians 1:11). Also, on this gospel depends the eternal life of human beings made in the image of

God.

So, no one should change or misinterpret the gospel. Since all humans are

*enemies of God (Romans 5:10) and hostile to God (Romans 8:7), many will respond angrily when we preach the gospel to them. Yet we are called to be servants of Christ and not pleasers of men (Galatians 1:10) but **preach the gospel with love** (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).*

(b) What is the Gospel? Paul gives us an outline of the gospel message in *Galatians 1:4 (Jesus), who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

The word "gospel" means good news that God in the person of Jesus Christ came to **rescue** (save) His humanity from this present evil age. This present evil age is full of misery, sin and death—caused by humanity's disobedience to God's commands. When you hear any news, all you can do is believe it or reject it. Nothing else! God rescues those who believe this **good news**. But those who

reject it will perish. (*John 3:18 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them*).

Despite enormous advances in science — disorder, misery, and death reign today and have been reigning throughout human history since our first parents sinned. Although everyone knows what is 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 everybody sins, even from birth, so everybody is born a sinner. Even well-meaning religious founders and leaders are born sinners and also sin.

The sins of the world have caused disorder and misery throughout human history. **There seems to be no remedy because everyone is born a sinner, and everyone sins. No religious leader can change this situation.** The great Hindu guru Swami Vivekananda called Jesus the greatest guru. Indeed, Jesus is the greatest teacher. But we do not need a teacher. We need one who can rescue us from this present evil age — a world of misery, sin and death. When Paul gives us the essence of Jesus' ministry, he doesn't call Jesus a teacher but says **He is a rescuer (Saviour)**. So, we can say **Jesus is the gospel. Jesus is the good news sent from God**. (*John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*).

(c) How did Jesus rescue us? He "gave Himself for our sins (v4a). The word "for" means "on behalf of" or "in place of". **Jesus lived a perfect life from birth**

till death — a life we should have lived but didn't. By His death and resurrection — He made the **essential exchange**. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and in exchange, Jesus put His righteousness into the account of our life. When God sees us, He sees the perfection of Jesus in us (*2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*). Therefore, Jesus is our Rescuer (Savior). In Jesus, we are **free from penalty or condemnation**. God declares us NOT GUILTY because we believe in His gospel. This essential exchange is called **justification** (legally declared JUST before God).

Jesus was raised from the dead: When a person is convicted of a crime, he is penalised and sentenced to prison (say, ten years). After he completes his term in prison, the government sets him free, acknowledging that he paid his penalty in full. The penalty for sin is death. Jesus took our penalty by His death. He was buried, and on the third day, the Father raised Him from the dead (*Galatians 1:1*),

satisfied He fully paid the penalty on our behalf. **We are now reconciled with God in Christ.** We receive **grace** and peace with the Father through Jesus' death and resurrection (*Galatians 1:3*). Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too, will rise from the dead to live for eternity with Him (*1 Cor 15:12-13*, *John 3:16*). Jesus rising from the dead proved His claim that He was the Son of God. It proved His divinity (*Matt 12:38-40; 16:21; 17:9,23; 20:19; 27:63; Mark 8:31; 9:9,31; 10:34; 14:58; Luke 9:22; 18:33; John 2:19-21*).

1 Corinthians 15:12-13 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Jesus rescues us entirely by His grace. Paul tells us in *Rom 5:6-11* that we were powerless, ungodly, and God's enemies. We could do nothing to save ourselves. Nothing! Furthermore, nothing good in us made us attractive to God. We were His enemies. God sent Jesus to rescue us entirely by His grace and reconcile us to God. When we believe the gospel, five main things happen to us:

(i) Jesus forgives us our sins plus puts His righteousness into our account by the essential exchange (*2 Cor 5:21*)

(ii) Jesus reconciles us to God even though we were His enemies (*Rom 5:8-10*).

(iii) Jesus gives us a new heart and a new spirit that we may want to obey God in the future (*Ezk 36:26-27*, *Heb 10:15-17*, *2 Cor 3:3*).

(iv) Jesus makes us children of God (*John 1:12-13*, *Eph 1:5*), having a relationship with Him, crying, "Abba Father" (*Rom 8:15*)

(v) Jesus makes us part of His **new creation** (*2 Cor 5:17*). One day, this rebellious world will perish forever, and only His new creation will survive.

Then God will be glorified throughout the earth (**Read *Rev 21:1-5***).

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

Rom 5:8-10 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Ezk 36:26-27 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. (also, Heb 10:15-17, 2 Cor 3:3)

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Rom 8:15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

2 Cor 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

3. Conclusion This is the good news (the gospel) of our Lord Jesus Christ, which the Bible teaches and Paul preached with apostolic authority. He severely warns us not to distort it. All we are called to do is to believe the good news and live

our

lives gratefully and humbly, trusting in the grace of God and giving Him the glory.

What is the Gospel? — Its Core

Outline

1. What is the Gospel?
2. From where does it come?
3. For whom is it?
4. What is the gospel's core (central part or heart of the gospel)?

1. What is the Gospel?

The gospel is (not a philosophy or good advice), but it is simply the Good News of God's actions through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross for human beings and rose again to set us free from sin, Satan and death that has caused human misery and is destroying God's creation. Jesus also brings a new creation on earth, and those who believe in Him as Saviour and Lord will be a part of it.

2. From where does it come?

Romans 1:1-2 Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — 2 the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

- **The gospel comes from God (Rom 1:1, the Gospel of God)** — meaning it is from God and belongs to God. It starts with God. In other words, the gospel (good news) is NOT a human invention but a divine revelation. [Paul says in *Galatians 1:11-12 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; instead, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*].
- **The gospel comes from God's love** — *John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- **The gospel is promised in the Old Testament Scriptures** (Romans 1:2: *the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures*). The gospel was what God promised from *Genesis 3:15*, when He said the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head. The OT prophets spoke of a new covenant (*Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27*). They spoke of the Messiah whose sacrifice would make it possible (*Isaiah 9:6-7; 53:1-12*). The gospel is in the story of Exodus, in the Passover festival etc.

3. For whom is it? It is for everyone who believes

Romans 1: 16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile*".

(a) We must proclaim the gospel to everyone

Paul says in Rom 1:14 I am *obligated* both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. (Greeks are Greek-speaking Gentiles—mostly educated, and non-Greeks are barbarians, primarily uneducated), then he includes the wise and the foolish — **so everyone is included**. Note that Paul feels *obligated* to preach — meaning that he **owes** everyone the opportunity to hear the gospel.

The gospel is good news to humanity, whom God created in His image. He presented His Son as the **ONLY** means we are rescued from slavery to sin; we can find forgiveness, sonship, and eternal life.

The gospel is precious to God (because it involves the sacrifice of His one and only Son). It is also precious to humanity (because it is the **ONLY** means of our rescue from slavery to sin and the only way to eternal life). Therefore, we must **proclaim it to everyone**.

(b) **We must use words to proclaim news (the good news or gospel)**. A good and faithful proclamation of the gospel "should" include the godly life and testimony of those who proclaim it (e.g. holy living, acts of mercy and charity to our neighbours). Without these, preaching the gospel appears hypocritical and a bad witness. However, holy living and testimony by itself are not the gospel. We must use words to proclaim the gospel because we use words to proclaim news.

(c) **We must not be ashamed to proclaim the gospel**. Because it is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16). God will **not** give His power for salvation except through the gospel. When we proclaim it, we must remember two things:

- The gospel does not belong to us, nor comes from us, but it is of God and belongs to Him (Romans 1:1).

- Preaching the gospel will cause conflict and anger in many who hear it. We must preach it in love, but we cannot alter the gospel or sugarcoat it to suit the people.

4. What is the gospel's core? (or essentials or central part of the gospel)

At its core, the gospel is Jesus Christ — His Person (Romans 1:3-4) and His work on our behalf (Romans 1:17). **Jesus is the gospel!**

His Person: Jesus is fully or 100% man (Rom 1:3) and fully or 100% God (Rom 1:4). *Romans 1:3-4 regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, 4 and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Rom 1:3: "his earthly life" Two reliable ancient historians (not Christians)

mention

Jesus' existence as an actual historical human being, not a myth. The Roman historian Tacitus (56-120 AD) mentions Jesus in his *Annals* XV-44 and the

Jewish

historian Josephus (38-100 AD) in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (2.18.3). Modern scholars accept these two references as genuine. **Jesus is a 100% man who existed in human history.** Many modern history scholars (unbelievers and believers) accept the four gospels and almost all of Paul's epistles as historically accurate. Jesus is not a myth.

Rom 1:3: "descendant of David" OT prophets said the Messiah would be a descendant of David (2Sam 7:12-13; Ps 89:3-4; Isa 11:1-5; Jer 23:5-6). Joseph, Jesus' legal father (Matt 1:16), was King David's descendant.

Rom 1:4: Spirit of holiness is another title of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead.

Rom 1:4: The Son of God, used nearly 30 times in the gospels, means Jesus Christ is the same as God in His nature and essence. Jesus is the eternal Son and 2nd Person of the Trinity (Isa 9:6, Gal 4:4). He is entirely (100%) God from eternity. Even when He became man in His incarnation, Jesus did not cease to be God 100%. In Jewish culture, the only son would inherit all the father had, so they considered the only son equal to the father. Jesus claimed to be "**the Son of God**" (not just a son of God). The Jewish leaders understood its significance and accused Jesus of blasphemy for claiming to be God. So they crucified Him (Matt 26:65-66; Mark 14:63-64; John 10:33). But His rise from the dead proves He is God's Son.

Rom 1:4: Was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: The Greek word for "appointed" (or declared) is "*horizo*", from which the English word "horizon" comes. Just as the horizon is a clear line separating earth and sky, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a clear sign that separates Him

from the rest of humanity. By His resurrection, Jesus demonstrates His victory over death and provides the most conclusive evidence that He is who He claimed to be — the Son of God. Hundreds of people witnessed His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:4-8), and overnight, those Jews who saw it believed that Jesus,

a man, could be the God He claimed to be. The Jewish understanding of this sudden belief that a man could be God is amazing. Jesus' divinity is, therefore, part of the gospel that saves you (Rom 10:9-10). It proves that Jesus Christ is who He claims to be. And the Father accepted His sacrifice in place of sinners (Rom 4:24).

Without Jesus' resurrection, our faith is useless; there is no salvation (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17) and no gospel.

His work on our behalf:

Romans 1:17 *For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith".*

Alistair Begg refers to John Stott giving the CORE OF THE GOSPEL in 4 words — **REQUIRES, ACHIEVES, REVEALS & GRANTS** (or bestows or gives)

(i) **REQUIRES**: God **requires** absolute moral perfection if we ever stand before Him. And that moral perfection we can never produce by our efforts. The prophet

Isaiah was a decent man by human standards. Yet, when he had a vision of God, he immediately cried, "*Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.*" (Isa 6:5).

Everyone will one-day face judgment by God. The Bible says in Heb 9:27, "*Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment*". And as mentioned, God requires absolute moral perfection as we stand before Him, and we would be held accountable by Him. But we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Four words describe every one of us when God judges us — **sinful, guilty, accountable and lost** (damned).

(ii) **ACHIEVES**: The perfect righteousness that God requires of us but which we cannot produce to stand before Him, God **achieves** in the perfect sacrifice of His

Son Jesus. From birth to death, Jesus lived sinless as a man we should have lived but didn't. He then took our sin upon Himself and died on the cross to pay the penalty we should have paid, but He paid for it.

So, God displays and satisfies His perfect justice in dealing with sin by punishment on the cross. Without Jesus' sacrifice, God would never be a God of justice if He ever chose to forgive us. But because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice on our behalf, God could legally declare us **NOT GUILTY**. God could also accept

us as having Jesus' righteousness, which is the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*). This is the **essential exchange at the cross**. This is justification.

(iii) REVEALS: God not only requires perfect righteousness from us, then _____ achieves _____

it for us, but He also **reveals** it to us in the gospel. "*For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed*" (Rom 1:17). That's why we must be a people of the gospel and declare it to **everyone**. Because, as we have seen before, the ^{gospel} *is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes*.

(iv) GRANTS: God's righteousness is what God requires if we can ever stand before Him. That which He requires, God achieves in the sacrifice of Christ, and He reveals in the gospel (good news), and finally, that righteousness of God which

He requires, God **grants** to all those who trust (believe, have faith) in the gospel. The word grant is another word for grace.

So our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And the righteous will live by faith.

End Notes:

1. **What is meant by faith that saves us?** It has three components— (i) We must know the gospel content, (ii) We must mentally agree with the gospel content

(iii) we must trust our lives on the gospel content, which includes repentance. All three are necessary for transformation.

2. **Why must the gospel be proclaimed first to the Jews (Romans 1:16)?** Because:

- God trusted the Jews with His revelation in the Old Testament (Rom 3:2), and Jesus said salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22).
- Jews were God's chosen people (Rom 11:1)
- Jesus came on earth through the Jews (Rom 9:5)

Paul consistently went first to the Jews to preach the gospel (Acts 13:5,14, 14:1, 17:2,10,17, 18:4,19, 19:8), and when they rejected him, he turned to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46, 18:6, 28:25-28). Today, we continue to evangelise the Jews, but Jesus and the apostles fulfilled their priority.

Reference: Sermon by Alistair Begg on What is the Gospel

Gospel, Resurrection and History

Introduction

Expert historians, also known as critical historians, both Non-Christian and Christian, would examine any ancient document by two criteria for its accuracy of any event mentioned in them.

(a) The ancient document must have **at least two reliable, independent early eyewitnesses** of any historical event

(b) The ancient document must be **written close** to the historical event.

So, when it comes to the New Testament, expert non-Christian historians would not consider it a sacred document revealed by God. But they would examine it on the same basis as any other ancient document.

Here, we will examine the historical accuracy of our Lord Jesus' Resurrection.

Outline

1. Paul is a very reliable eyewitness of the Resurrection

2. Paul wrote reliable ancient documents very close to the Resurrection

3. Paul wrote the gospel message in 1 Cor 15:3-8

1. Paul is a very reliable eyewitness of the Resurrection:

Expert historians consider Paul to be a very reliable eyewitness because:

- Paul started by being a hostile persecutor of Christians before he became a Christian himself.

- Paul was also a learned scholar by training (under Gamaliel) and in his writings (e.g., Paul's scholarly epistle to the Romans).

- Paul lived as an adult before and after the crucifixion. So, he knew what was happening. He also knew others who lived in that period who knew what was happening.

Therefore, historians consider Paul to be a very reliable source of information.

Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:3-8 that hundreds of people witnessed the risen Jesus—Peter, James and Paul, 12 Apostles, 500 brothers simultaneously, and all the apostles. Except for Paul, the rest saw the risen Jesus ~~during the~~ first 40 days after his Resurrection (30 AD). Paul saw the risen Jesus, probably two or three years later, on his road to Damascus in 33 AD (Acts 9:1-19). Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:6 that many eyewitnesses of Jesus' Resurrection were still alive at his writing in 55 AD. He means one could ask them to verify that the Resurrection is true.

So, besides Paul, at least 500 eyewitnesses of the Resurrection lived at the time Paul wrote his letters, and they could refute him if it were not true.

2. Paul wrote reliable ancient documents at a date very close to Resurrection

Gal 1:17-21 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. 18 Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Then I went to Syria and Cilicia.

Gal 2:1-2 Then, after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation, and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain

30 AD Most	Historians estimate that Jesus died in 30 AD (see End Note)
33 AD Most	Historians estimate Paul saw the risen Jesus on the Damascus road in 33 AD. Soon afterwards, Paul went to Arabia and Damascus <i>Gal 1:11-12</i> and lived there for three years. During this time, Jesus personally taught the gospel to Paul.
35-36 AD	After Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem to get "acquainted" with <i>Gal 1:18-19</i> Peter and Jesus' brother James for 15 days. "Acquainted" (Greek <i>historeo</i>) — means to visit for information about the gospel. <i>Gal 1:18-21</i> Then Paul went to Syria and Cilicia.
50 AD	Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem to check with Peter, James and John whether the gospel message Paul preached to the <i>Gal 2:1-10</i> Gentiles was correct — with no Gentile circumcision. They said it was right.
51-52 AD	Paul goes to Corinth and preaches the same gospel message. He was <i>Acts 18:12</i> persecuted in Corinth when Gallo was proconsul. In 1905, at Delphi in Greece, archaeologists found an inscription on stone, dated 51-52 AD, with Gallio's name inscribed (people appointed city leaders for a one-year term only). It makes 51-52 AD the most reliable date in Biblical history. See https://bit.ly/3YNW5I1
55 AD	Paul wrote 1 Corinthian in 55 AD (latest), 25 years after the Resurrection.

Comparing ancient historical documents of notable people

- Alexander the Great historical record was **425** years after his death in 330 BC.
- Gautam Buddha's earliest historical record was **386** years after his death in 486

BC. (Earliest Pali Canon 100 BC)

- Mohammad's earliest historical record was **135** years after his death in 632 AD.
- Jesus' earliest historical record was a maximum of **25** years after His death

and Resurrection in 30 AD.

3. Paul wrote the Gospel Message in 1 Cor 15:3-8

1 Cor 15:3-8 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James,

then

to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Paul writes that the same gospel message he received (from Peter, James & John) is what he passed on to the Corinthians. The language used of transmission (*what I received I passed on to you as of first importance*) shows the message is not a story that gets distorted over time. But it is an important message (or teaching) that rabbis would use to transmit accurately down the generations.

Now, when was this message composed? Answer: Soon after the Resurrection by the first eyewitnesses Peter, James and John, **around 30 AD**. Paul received this message in 35-36 AD when he visited Jerusalem to meet them. Historians say Christians composed this gospel message (1 Cor 15:3-4) in a rhythmic creedal form around 30 AD. In those days, few people were literate and would need a simple form to memorise, similar to how we recite nursery rhymes (like Jack and Jill went up the hill etc.). And we know that simple nursery rhymes pass on from one generation to another, for over 100 years, without distortion.

That message is that Christ (Messiah) died for our sins according to the scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according

to the scriptures. He appeared to Peter and the others. That message is the gospel, in which we must have Faith —Jesus is Divine, died for our sins, was buried,

and rose again.

Leading scholars today say that for Christianity to survive in 30 AD, at least two vital doctrines must exist. If not, then Jesus would be one among many other false Messiahs. Those two essential doctrines are:

- The Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus
- The Divinity of Jesus. (His Resurrection proved His claims that He was God)

The amazing expansion of the Church in 30 AD (after Resurrection & Pentecost) took place despite persecution.

There are two things that no Jew [or Muslim] would believe, even today

- That a man could be God
- The Resurrection with an incorruptible body could occur in the middle of history and not only on the last judgement day.

That's precisely what 1 Cor 15:3-4 teaches — and so the rapid expansion of the Early Church in Israel is another proof of the Resurrection of Jesus and the truth of the gospel message.

The Romans and Jewish leaders persecuted and killed thousands of early Christians. To prevent persecution, all they had to do is to deny that Jesus rose from the dead. But they didn't. Many people die for their country. But no one dies

to insist that a fantastic event, like the resurrection, occurred. This is another proof of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

End Note: Traditionally, Christians say that our Lord Jesus died and rose again in 33 AD. If you would take 33 AD as true, then it would make reduce the time from 25 years to 23 years between the year of the resurrection to when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15.

Reference: Lecture by Dr Gary Habermas on the Resurrection of Jesus.

Gospel, Resurrection and Mary Magdalene

Outline

1. Mary Magdalene — the first eyewitness of the Resurrection
2. Resurrected Body of Jesus

Read John 20:1-18

1. Mary Magdalene, the first eyewitness of the Resurrection of Jesus

John 20:9 For they did not yet understand the scripture that he had to rise from the dead. The disciples did not perceive from the Old Testament prophecy that Jesus had to rise from the dead, so they did not make a resurrection story to fit a preconceived understanding of OT prophecy (read Luke 24:25-27, 32,4-46).

Expert historians (whether Christian or non-Christian) would not consider the New Testament as a sacred document revealed by God. They would examine it like any other ancient document by two criteria for its accuracy of **any event mentioned in them**.

- Having **at least two reliable, independent early eyewitnesses** of any historical event
- Having **reliable ancient documents** written close to the historical event.

Expert Historians consider Mary Magdalene a reliable eyewitness because she lived in a period when people considered women unreliable as a witness in court and considered them of inferior status in society. Yet the gospels mentioned her as the first eyewitness of the resurrection. If the gospel writers were to invent the resurrection, they would not have chosen a woman to be the first eyewitness. Instead, they would have chosen men of some status like Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus. Also, Mary had a notorious background as Jesus had cast out seven demons out of her (Luke 8:2). Considering Mary Magdalene with a notorious background and being a woman was the first eyewitness meant the writers did not invent the resurrection story. She was indeed the first eyewitness of the resurrection. (Matt 28:1-8, Mark 16:9, John 20:11-18).

Mary Magdalene's understanding of Jesus:

Mary was the first to visit the tomb, and Peter and John came. The men saw the empty tomb and left soon after. But Mary remained, weeping and still looking for the body of Jesus. Then, having conquered death, the risen Jesus meets her, unlike a flashy victorious superhero. Instead, He **gently** asks her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" (John 20:15). Thinking He was the gardener, Mary replies that she seeks the body of Jesus. But Mary could never have found Jesus:

- despite her passionate, single-eyed devotion to Him,
- despite knowing that Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead and
- despite knowing His claims that He is the resurrection and the life.

Yet Mary's mindset could never have comprehended who Jesus is. He is beyond her understanding. Mary was still looking for a dead Jesus and not a risen one.

Jesus reveals Himself to her, calling her "Mary". Then she recognised Jesus, calling Him Rabboni (Teacher). From this meeting in John 20:16, we learn:

(i) Jesus is too wonderful and is beyond our understanding. We can only know Him by revelation from the Father in heaven. But the gates of hell will not overpower the church built by revelation (Matt 16:16-18)

(ii) All our culture, upbringing, education, and everything human about us will be of no advantage to understanding who Jesus is because our minds cannot comprehend Him. Only Jesus coming to us can break through our tiny minds. But as we seek Him with all our hearts as Mary Magdalene did, He will come, and He comes to us gently (*Jer 29:12-14 Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will let Myself be found by you,* declares the LORD)

(iii) Choosing Mary, a reformed woman with a notorious past, to be not only the first eyewitness and also the first person commissioned by Jesus to go and tell others of His resurrection (John 20:17) — shows that Jesus is saying that I don't choose you by your status, your intellect, your work, your education, your character, your gender — but entirely by My choice and My grace. He saves us by grace through faith, not by our works, so that no one can boast (Eph 2:8-9).

(iv) Jesus calls her by her first name, "Mary", with tenderness and gentleness.

Jesus would contact us the same way. It means He loves us dearly, cares for us immensely, and calls us to intimate friendship with Him. If we grasp this truth,

we would not be seeking our identity from the praise or respect the world offers. Our company with Him would wholly satisfy us.

2. The Resurrected Body of Jesus:

John 20:17-18 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene recognised and clung to the risen Jesus. He told her not to do so as He had not yet returned to the Father (John 20:17). This means we, too, would have something similar to Jesus' resurrected body. The resurrected body had the following properties:

- It was not a spirit or ghost-like because Mary could cling to Him
- It could travel in space, travel through walls, and could eat food (Luke 24:37-43)
- It could become invisible and disappear (Luke 24:30-31)
- It could disguise itself so even friends would not recognise it (Luke 24:13-30)
- It could **not** be in different places at the same time. Mary clung to Him and did not want to lose Him. But Jesus had to do many things before He ascended. But once He ascended to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with every one of us anywhere at any time. (Similarly, our resurrected bodies cannot be omnipresent like God is.)
- It is of imperishable flesh and blood and, therefore, eternal. (*1 Cor 15:52-54 For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory.*

Gospel, Four Gospels, Paul's Gospel and the Whole Gospel

Outline

1. Meaning of the Gospel
2. Writers of the Four Gospels
3. Vital Elements of the Four Gospels
4. The Kingdom of God in the Four Gospels
5. Synoptic Gospels and Paul's Gospel
6. The Whole Gospel and the Bible Story

1. Meaning of the Gospel

The Gospel is the good news of God Himself intervening in human history to save humanity from misery and a perishing world and bring an eternal new creation. The word **Gospel** comes from the old English term "god-spell", which means "**good news**" (Greek, evangelion). The Gospel is good news and not good advice. In the olden days, there were no newspapers, and the only way to spread the news was by shouting it aloud on the streets. Tribal wars were common. Notable runners carried the news of the war's outcome from the battlefield and proclaimed it aloud in the tribal city. When a king lost the battle, it was terrible news. His entire tribe was taken captive, and the victorious opponent often brutally treated its people. However, if a king won, it was **good news**, and his whole tribe rejoiced.

The New Testament writers used this same word (Greek euangelion) for the Gospel (**good news**). The good news is that the Eternal Son of God Himself entered human history as a man in Jesus Christ. Jesus came as humanity's new representative to defeat Satan and save us from human misery, sin, death and a perishing world—through His life, death and resurrection. He also came to start a new creation that would last for eternity. God has invited everyone everywhere to look at, believe in, and trust Jesus. He is the central character in the Bible and the only way we can be saved from a perishing world and be part of his eternal new creation.

2. Writers of the Four Gospels

Four people wrote the authentic biography of Jesus Christ — about His life, death and resurrection. We call them the **four gospels**, though it is just **one Gospel (one good news)** according to each of the writers — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. So, we should properly call them *the Gospel according to Matthew*,

Gospel according to Mark, etc. We have four gospels because, during the early church period, four people wrote the story of Jesus, each for a different target audience and with a different emphasis and purpose.

Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, emphasising Jesus' fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy, proving He is the long-awaited Messiah—the King of the Jews.

Mark wrote to a Gentile audience, especially a Roman one. He emphasises Jesus as the servant who came to suffer for the sins of humanity. Mark's Gospel is a fast-paced, action-packed story of Jesus' miraculous deeds. It is less on Jesus' long teachings than in the other gospels. His is the shortest Gospel.

Luke wrote to a broad, Gentile audience. Luke's Gospel is the longest of the four. It is a historical, journalistic, and thorough account of the events in Jesus' life. Luke portrays Jesus' perfect humanity and His concern for the weak, the suffering, and the outcast.

John wrote so readers may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. So they may have life in His Name (John 20:31). John emphasises Jesus' deity by carefully selecting Jesus' conversations and sayings with miraculous signs to prove it.

There probably were many who wrote about Jesus. However, the early church chose the writings by one of the 12 chosen apostles or by his follower. Jesus taught His chosen apostles personally. They had witnessed His resurrection from the dead. In selecting these four gospels as accurate, the early church wanted to be as close as possible to the eyewitness records of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In 100 AD, there were only four such gospels that the people widely accepted as authentic.

3. Vital Elements of the Four Gospels: Five Common Vital Points in each of the Four Gospels are:

(i) **Jesus is fully God** (Matt 1:23, 3:13-17; Mark 1:1,9-11; Luke 1:32-35, 3:21-22; John 1:1,14,29-34)

(ii) **Jesus is fully man** (Matt 1:1, 12:23, 15:22, 21:9, 26:37; Mark 10:48, 12:35; Luke 2:40, 4:2, 8:23, 9:58; John 4:6, 7:42)

(iii) **Jesus' miracles and teachings** (Matt 4-25; Mark 1-13; Luke 4-19:27; John 2-17)

(iv) **Jesus' betrayal, trial, and death** (Matt 26-27; Mark 14-15; Luke 19:28-23:56; John 18-19)

(v) **Jesus' resurrection** (Matt 28; Mark 16-18; Luke 24 John 20-21)

The four gospels are like biographies of Jesus—His parents, brothers and sisters, His followers etc. **However, the main part is the last week of His life**, which is between **30% and 50% of the Four Gospels**. Most of the remaining portion contains His teachings and miracles during the last three years of His life.

Many people love Jesus' kingdom teachings but leave out His death on the cross, resurrection, and its meaning. Others concentrate only on His death on the cross and resurrection but leave out His kingdom teachings which we must obey. However, His death on the cross, resurrection, and kingdom teachings are essential to the Four Gospels.

4. The Kingdom of God in the Four Gospels

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the *Synoptic Gospels* because we see similar things in them. (Syn means similar, and Optic means seeing—so synoptic means seeing similar things). We see that the *Synoptic Gospels* include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and with similar wording. In contrast, the *Gospel of John* has vastly different content. Furthermore, the *Synoptic Gospels* often mention the kingdom of God, whereas the *Gospel of John* rarely mentions it. **Why the difference?**

The *Gospel of John* emphasises the individual and inward spiritual aspects of being in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not an earthly political kingdom. John quotes Jesus as saying — Yes, I am King. However, *My kingdom is not of this world* (John 18:36-37). Whenever the *Synoptic Gospels* talk of the kingdom of God, they emphasise the social and behavioural changes that the

same

Gospel brings through us. We can say that John's *Gospel* and the *Synoptic Gospels*

are two forms of the same *Gospel*.

(a) John stresses the individual aspect of our salvation

(b) the *Synoptics* stress the corporate aspect as a result of our salvation.

5. The Synoptic Gospels and Paul's Gospel

Reading the *Synoptic Gospels* led many people to say that Jesus preached the **Gospel of the Kingdom** (Matt 4:23, Mark 1:15, Luke 4:43):

Matt 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

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

Whereas, those people said, Paul preached the **Gospel of salvation**.

*Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of **the Gospel** because it is the power of God **that brings salvation** to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the*

Gentile. 17 For in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

So, those people said the two gospels are different. However, such reasoning is not valid. Paul said he received his Gospel directly from the risen Lord Jesus in Arabia and Damascus (Gal 1:11-12), which he confirmed and found agreement with Peter and John (Gal 1:18-19, 2:1-2, 1 Cor 15:11). And Mark's Gospel was basically what Peter had told Mark. Concerning the gospel, Paul says he preached the same as Peter, John and James (1 Cor 15:11 *Whether it is I or they, this is what we preach and what you believed*).

Prof Simon Gathercole ¹ compares the outlines of the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel that Paul preached. He proves them to be essentially the same.

Paul's gospel outline:

(i) Jesus was the promised Messianic King and Son of God who came to earth as a servant in human form. (Rom 1:3-4, Phil 2:5-11)

(ii) By His death and resurrection, Jesus atoned for our sins and secured our justification by grace, not by our works (1 Cor 15:3-7, Eph 2:8-9)

(iii) On the cross, Jesus broke the dominion of sin and evil over us (Col 2:13-15).

At his return, Jesus will complete what He began by the total renewal of the entire material creation and the resurrection of our bodies (Rom 8:18-25).

Synoptic Gospels outline:

(i) Jesus is the Messiah; He is the divine Son of God (Mark 1:1)

(ii) Jesus died as a substitutionary ransom for many (Mark 10:45)

(iii) Jesus has conquered the present demonic age with its sin and evil (Mark 1:21-2:12) and will return to renew the material world (Matt 19:28)

6. The Whole Gospel and the Bible Story

Now, when we try reading the Bible and trying to understand its story, we may find it very complicated. However, it is a four-point story—Creation, the Fall of

man, Redemption by Jesus and the Final Restoration and Renewal of creation with a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21).

When we speak of the Gospel, we often talk of the third part (Redemption) with respect to the first two parts of the Bible story (Creation and Fall). We stress the individual's salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and not by works. Though this Gospel is true, it is incomplete without the fourth part of the Bible story (Restoration and Renewal of creation). When the fourth part is missing, Christians understand that we get to heaven, but nothing else about this world matters.

However, grasping the whole Gospel should interest us in evangelistic conversions and service to our neighbours, especially the poor and oppressed. The Gospel should also make us interested in working for peace, justice, and environmental protection **as evidence** of the new creation. The new creation has already come on earth through the Gospel (2 Cor 5:17), and Jesus will complete it when He comes again, which is the fourth and final part of the Gospel (Rev 21).

So, to define the "Whole Gospel", I quote Tim Keller,

The Whole Gospel is that the Eternal Son of God entered human history as a man

in Jesus Christ, who, by His life, death and resurrection, came to save us,

powerless

sinners, trapped in a perishing world and to bring us into fellowship with Him and to

restore the whole of creation in which we can be a part of and to enjoy eternal

life

~~with the~~ Gospel of Paul & Gospel of Kingdom by Simon Gathercole on TGC <https://bit.ly/3CbCKrP>