

Matt Chandler

the
Explicit
Bible Study
Gospel

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LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press®
© 2012 Matt Chandler
Third printing 2013

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ISBN 978-1-4158-7362-5
Item 005500792

Dewey decimal classification: 234
Subject headings: BIBLE. N.T. GOSPELS \
CHRISTIAN LIFE \ GOD

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Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0152

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The Author



Matt Chandler serves as the lead pastor of teaching at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas. Having served in that role since December 2002, he describes his tenure at The Village as a replanting effort to change the theological and philosophical culture of the congregation. The church has witnessed a tremendous response, growing from 160 people to more than 10,000, with satellite campuses in Flower Mound, Dallas, and Denton.

Alongside his current role as lead pastor, Matt is involved in church-planting efforts both locally and internationally through The Village and various strategic partnerships. Prior to accepting the pastorate at The Village, Matt had a vibrant itinerant ministry for more than 10 years that gave him the opportunity to speak to thousands of people in America and abroad about the glory of God and the beauty of Jesus.

Recently, Matt was named the president of Acts 29, a worldwide church-planting organization. Over the past 10 years Acts 29 has emerged from a small band of brothers to more than four hundred churches in the United States and networks of churches in multiple countries.

Other than knowing Jesus, Matt's greatest joy is being married to Lauren and being the dad to their three children, Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

Introduction

Once I heard several new believers tell the stories of how they were saved. I was a little surprised by what I heard. One after another, each person told some variation of the same story: “I grew up in church; we were there every time the doors were open. I was baptized when I was six, seven, or eight but didn’t understand what the gospel was. After a while I lost interest in church and Jesus, and I started walking in open sin. Someone recently sat me down and explained the gospel to me for the first time. I was blown away. No one ever taught me that.”

For the first time I asked myself, *How can you grow up going to church every week and not hear the gospel?* After having a few conversations, I concluded that those people who had once walked away from the gospel hadn’t heard the real gospel at all. Rather, they had accepted a perversion of the gospel claiming that after they were saved, they were on our own, responsible for earning favor with God and justifying themselves before Him through good behavior. The emphasis was on being good and avoiding bad, not on a God who redeems and sustains. The gospel had been assumed, not taught or proclaimed as central. It hadn’t been explicit.

For some reason we think although the cross saves us from past sin, then we have to take over and clean ourselves up after we are saved. This thinking is devastating to the soul. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were saved by the gospel, would be sustained by it, and were currently standing in it. Thinking we can abandon our Savior along our spiritual journey and go back to self-reliance is idolatry. Elsewhere Paul taught that even religious effort is worthless compared to the surpassing greatness of Christ (see Phil. 3:4-9). If we add to or subtract from the cross, we rob God of His glory and Christ of His sufficiency.

Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation for us, not because of the great stuff we’ve done but because Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death. We are saved, sanctified, and sustained by what Jesus did for us on the cross and through the power of His resurrection. Our past sin, our current struggles, and our future failures are paid in full by the marvelous, infinite, matchless grace found in the atoning work of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Over the next six weeks I want to challenge you to grasp the centrality of the gospel for all of the Christian life, from the moment of salvation, through the lifelong process of sanctification, and continuing into eternity. We’ll see how the glory of God reigns supreme over every moment in His plan for our lives and how the cross captures and resurrects our dead hearts. We’ll also see that the gospel is not just personal but cosmic. Christ’s atoning work reveals God’s plan of redemption from the beginning of time to the end of time. The gospel fulfills the longing of all creation to be made new in Christ.

I pray that through this study, you will glimpse the size and weight of the good news, the eternity-spanning glory of the finished work of Christ.

Week 1

**The Gospel of
Past, Present,
and Future**

Start

Welcome to your first small-group discussion of *The Explicit Gospel*. Begin the session with the activity below.

Several words in the English language have multiple definitions and uses. For example, the word *strike* can refer to both hitting something (in a fight) and missing something (in a baseball game).

Take a minute to think of a word that has multiple definitions. Write down as many of those definitions as you can think of in three to five minutes. At the end of the allotted time, consider sharing the results of your work with the rest of the group.

What first comes to mind when you hear the word *gospel*?

What are different definitions and uses of the word *gospel* in today's culture?
In the church?

Watch

Complete the viewer guide below as you view DVD session 1.

Paul is just as concerned with _____ understanding the gospel as he is with non-Christians understanding the gospel.

The gospel is not simply for those who _____ know Christ, but it's just as much for those who _____ know Christ.

You were saved by _____ the gospel.

So much of our lack of holiness goes back to a misunderstanding of the gospel and what it means to _____ in the gospel _____.

When we stand up to _____ and we don't give in to our flesh, that's standing in the gospel.

To persevere to the end, you constantly preach the gospel to _____.

God wove delight in our _____ into the fabric of creation to remind us of His deep and abiding _____ in us in Jesus Christ.

The gospel sustains us. We just have to _____ it sustains us.

God works in the middle of _____.

God is making much of _____ in our salvation.

Your right standing before God is not built on you but on _____.

Video sessions available for purchase at lifeway.com/explicitgospel

Respond

Discuss the DVD segment with your group, using the questions below.

What struck you as new or interesting in the DVD segment?

Look at the definition you wrote earlier for the word *gospel*. What changes, if any, would you make to that definition after hearing Matt speak?

Do you agree that the gospel applies to those who know Christ as much as it applies to those who still need to experience salvation? Why or why not?

Summarize what it means to stand in the gospel as a follower of Jesus.

How would you describe your current understanding and practice of the gospel: crawling like a wounded soldier, taking your first steps, walking confidently, or running?

What obstacles or attitudes are holding you back from advancing in your understanding and practice of the gospel?

Identify one action you could take this week to move beyond those obstacles and attitudes. If you're willing, share that action with the group.

Suggested Scripture memory for this week: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-2

Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you—unless you believed for no purpose.

Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

What is most
important in the
Christian life?

The answer might
be tougher to
pin down than
you think.

The Gospel of Past, Present, and Future

If an outsider to the faith wanted to answer that question and surveyed evangelical churches to learn the focal point of their teachings, what would he find? He might find that the most important thing is behavior. Sunday after Sunday behavioral dictums are handed down from the pulpit in an effort to create well-mannered citizens. Or he might find that the answer is heaven and hell. Every week pastors extol the virtues and declare the terrors of eternal life or eternal death. Or he might find that the most important thing in Christianity is how to live better—to become wealthier, healthier, and better husbands, wives, children, and employees.

But if you asked the apostle Paul that question, he wouldn't waver. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 he clearly recorded for us what is most important in the Christian life.

It's the gospel.

What Is the Gospel?

The gospel is making a comeback. Have you noticed?

It's pretty popular right now in evangelical circles to talk about the gospel. From books to blogs, conferences to DVDs, there is a call back to what Paul called "most important" (1 Cor. 15:3). But with all this talk about the gospel, there comes a tendency to use the word without really understanding what it means.

In fact, there are false gospels today, just as in Paul's day. That's why our understanding of, belief in, and proclamation of the gospel must be explicit. We'd better be talking about the same thing Paul and the other biblical authors wrote about when the gospel is mentioned in Scripture.

In a few sentences, what is the gospel?

Read Galatians 1:6-9. What did Paul say should happen to those who preach a false gospel?

Does that seem extreme to you? Why or why not?

The gospel was no laughing matter to Paul. Here the same man who wished he could go to hell on behalf of his unbelieving Jewish countrymen said those who don't preach the explicit gospel should be cursed—eternally condemned. And in case you didn't get it the first time, he said it again for emphasis: "As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!" (Gal. 1:9).

Are you starting to see it? The gospel—the undiluted, unchanging, explicit gospel—is the foundation for everything. We need to get it right.

What are some ways our culture changes the gospel today?

How do churches add to the gospel?

What methods have you tried?

How might you guard against incorporating an altered gospel into your own faith?

In the Book of Galatians, some teachers in the church were advocating a grace-plus system. They argued that the cross of Jesus Christ and the grace of God were a great place to begin, but if you really wanted to be acceptable to God, you needed to progress from there. You had to observe certain religious days of the year, eat a certain way, and be circumcised. Those might seem like small things, but these subtle variances corrupted the good news of grace.

These efforts are self-reliance instead of God-reliance. The idolatry in the human heart always wants to lead us away from our Savior and back to self-reliance, no matter how pitiful that self-reliance is. All your church attendance, your religious activities, your Sunday School attendance pins, your journals, and your quiet times—it's all in vain if you don't have Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. Record the essential message of the gospel, according to Paul.

There isn't much wiggle room in this passage. Christ died for our sins. He was buried and rose again. And all this happened according to God's plan. That's the gospel. It's not Jesus plus our best effort. The gospel is centered on the work of Christ and His work alone.

But something else in this passage is instructive for us too. Somewhere along the line, we started thinking the gospel is strictly about heaven and hell—the means by which we get out of one and into the other. In other words, the purpose of the gospel is for when we die. But look back at verses 1-2, and you'll see a dramatically different viewpoint.

Based on 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, did Paul see the gospel as applicable only when we die? How do you know?

If we think of the gospel as applying only to our eternal destiny, we are short-changing the death of Christ in a dramatic way. According to Paul, the gospel isn't only for the lost; the gospel is also for the saved. It's not only for when you die but also for every day of your life. In fact, the only way someone can truly live the kind of life Jesus intended is to understand that the gospel is for your past, present, and future. It's the means by which you are saved, are made holy, and are preserved until the end.

Is the gospel the center point of your entire life, or have you relegated it to a certain part of your past, present, or future?

PRAY THE WORDS OF PAUL IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8 TODAY. PRAY FOR GOD TO REVEAL HOW YOU CAN LIVE A TRULY GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE AS YOU COMPLETE THIS STUDY.

The Gospel Saves You

“When did you get saved?”

Maybe it's a southern thing, but in the Bible Belt you can scarcely find a single person who hasn't heard that question. Most people actually have an answer too. But maybe the question has been asked so many times that we've forgotten the underlying assumption: in order to be saved, you must have been in great danger at one time. Even many people who can answer the question with a specific date and time don't feel the sense of impending doom that awaited them before they were saved. But the gospel can help us with that.

Have you ever been asked the previous question? How would you answer it?

What were you saved from?

How does knowing the answer to that question help you love and appreciate the gospel?