

The Gospel as Good News

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[0 : 0 0] Turn to the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13. I'm reading verse 32. And we declare unto you, God tidings.

And we declare unto you, God tidings. I'd like to ask you this morning, when did you last hear some really good news?

The kind of news that made you rush out of the room and tell other members of your family, wanted you to get on, got you on the phone to tell other people about this good news.

Well perhaps you've had some good news on a personal or a family level, perhaps someone who was successful in their O-levels, perhaps someone who found acceptance at university, perhaps someone who was engaged, very surprisingly the person got engaged, and you're full of it, you're full of the good news, or the birth of a child, or the birth of a grandchild, and you want to tell everyone. That's the kind of thing that wants to make you share with other people. Perhaps the children here, they come home from school, they've heard at school that they're getting a holiday on June 11th because of the general election, well it depends on what school you're in of course, but you hear that you're getting a holiday and that's good news, and you rush home and tell your parents that you're getting a holiday a day off school. I wonder what would make us rejoice in good news on a national front. Well perhaps if the unemployment figures went down very drastically, perhaps if inflation went down to zero, perhaps if something happened that really made us rejoice as a nation, or even on an international level. What would we rejoice in if we heard today perhaps that there was going to be peace in Lebanon, or Terry Waite had been freed, or something like that, something that really makes us rejoice and be glad. But in a whole good news is hard to come by. The news that would make you want to go out into the streets and tell other people, that news in these days is pretty hard to come by.

And so you say, where can we turn for good news? Where can we go for good news? Well someone says, go to the church for good news. Well someone else says, surely you must be out of your mind. You go along to the church and it looks, the building looks rather run down.

[2 : 5 4] There's not enough money for repairs. The congregation is scattered throughout a large building. They're mostly elderly folks. They go through the motions. They sing the familiar words, like a mighty army moves the church of God. The minister gives an inspirational message linked to some national or international events.

international events. But else they give a broadside against injustice in South Africa or unemployment in this country. And the people go out feeling better. They shake the minister's hands. God has been attended to for one moment in the week as it were. They've got no desire to come back to the evening meeting. They've got no desire to meet midweek for prayer. They've got no desire to go out and share the good news.

There's no thrill. There's no joy. So you say, it's not the place to go for good news. They say, would you like to become one of us? And you say, no, I've got enough problems of my own. And so you don't go to the church to hear good news.

Well, why don't you go to the church to hear good news? And the answer is because the church has lost the message that can really be described as good news. The church came into being as a result of the preaching of the good news.

And the institution remains. And the institution remains. But the heart has gone out of it. The message has gone out of it. Formality came in.

[4 : 40] The world came in. Worldliness came in. The message was turned to suit the needs of the age. And belief arose. The church lost confidence in our message.

And you see, these things ought not to be so. The church ought to be the only place where you hear really good news. Because you see, the gospel is good news. That's what the word gospel means. Evangel, good news.

And to evangelize is to tell the good news. And so how can we put joy back into the faces of God's people? How can we put verve into church life? How can we make people want to rush out and share this good news with others?

How can we make this gospel relevant to everyone? How can we make this gospel relevant? Not just to the lonely and the elderly and the young mothers and the children, but to the men in our generation, to the working man, to the professional man. How can we make this gospel relevant?

Well, the only answer is to go back and preach the gospel as good news. To preach that which lies at the very heart of the gospel and that's the good news of just the recreation by faith.

[6 : 14] How many times we have said that is the article of a standing or a falling church to quote Martin Luther. And you see the truth of how a person can be a good news.

How a person can be right with his maker. How a person can be right with God. How an unrighteous person can be right with God. How can I get rid of my guilt? How can I get rid of my sin? How can I be at peace with God? How can I be sure that I'm on the way to heaven?

Well, having come in our study of the knowledge of God. How can I be right with God? How can I be right with God? How can I be right with God? The doctrine of justification by faith.

If that's not even Christ, how can I be right with God is right with God. And that's the only good news that's relevant to all the people. This is the good news that's relevant to everyone.

I would like to think today that there are basically three categories of people in the world. There's the people who think they are Christians and hope that they are going to heaven.

[7 : 42] And then secondly there's the people who are under conviction and realise that as they are they will not get to heaven unless something is done to them or for them.

And thirdly there are the Christians and who have an assurance in varying degrees that they are going to heaven. So these are the three categories that I'm going to speak about this morning.

First of all the self-righteous. I will take a typical person in this category and I'll call her Mrs. Joan, a very common name.

Now you take Mrs. Joan. She was brought up in a good home. She went to Sabbath school and to church. She was brought up before the new morality came in and she's got no use for it whatever.

Religion has always been part of her life. The church means a lot to her. She sings in the choir. She arranges the flowers once a quarter. She visits the hospital with her group from the church.

- [8 : 50] She takes a communion four times a year. She's an excellent neighbour. Now this Mrs. Joan believes in God. And she believes that Christ is the Son of God and that he came into this world.
- She believes there's a life after death and that good people go to heaven. And apart from that doctrine doesn't mean much to her. And she hasn't got much use for doctrine apart from that.
- The doctrine of justification by faith for her is as strange as the theory of Pythagoras. She doesn't know anything about it. And she's not really interested in it.
- Because she thinks that she's got a standing before God for what she does. Now there are millions I could say like her in the world.
- There's millions inside and outside the church who think like that lady. We are jolted sometimes when we think or see something about the situation in our land today.
- [9 : 59] And that's the feeling I had after seeing Scottish Assembly with Malcolm Wilkins a week last Friday. Some of you may have seen it. A hundred people there and there was only one evangelical voice amongst them.
- And everyone there thought, yes they believed in God in some way, most of them. And they were Christians in some way and all this sort of thing. And it showed the appalling ignorance that there is in our land today.
- And so there are millions of people in that category. Well the question is, what does Mrs. Jones need to hear? What does Mrs. Jones need to be told?
- Oh well, she needs to be told a negative. She needs to be thundered on. She needs to be told that you'll never get to heaven by your good works.
- That you'll never get to heaven by arranging the flowers in church on Sunday. And she needs to be told the negatives. But she also needs to be told the positives.
- [11 : 03] This is where the good news comes in. Because you say, Mrs. Jones, there are times surely when you feel that the flowers could be a lot better.
- There are times, Mrs. Jones, when surely you feel you've opted out of wrong motives. There are times, Mrs. Jones, when surely you've let someone down.
- There are times when perhaps you've wondered whether you are indeed in the right way. And all your efforts are imperfect. You are frustrated.
- You are defeated. But there is good news for you. There's a perfect righteousness. And a perfect standing for you.
- There's forgiveness for you. There's something that will give you joy. There's something that will give you gladness. And you see, this message is good news for Mrs. Jones.
- [12 : 06] And she needs to hear it. You see, some people think that our message is only for those outside the church.
- But that's altogether wrong. We must evangelize our church people. We must evangelize all kinds of church people.
- We must take nothing for granted. We must evangelize our family. We must tell the good news. For the good news is for them. The good news is for all people.
- And so the good news is for Mrs. Jones. And we preach the good news. We declare unto you glad tidings. Good news for these kind of people.
- So I'll take the second category. Those who have been convicted. That they are not going to get to heaven by the way they've been going. That they had some understanding that this is not enough.

- [13 : 08] That they realize that they've come short indeed. They're convicted of it. They're under conviction of sin. Now I'll call this person, because it's an historical name, Mr. Luther.
- And it suits the case very well. This person has been awakened to think about God and about his soul. He's been awakened to think about time and eternity.
- About heaven and hell. About guilt and punishment. This person knows that God is holy. And that God has a standard. And that he's not reaching that standard.
- His conscience, you see, has been troubled. The voice of God in his soul. That conscience is troubled. And he's got no peace.
- And a struggle ensues. And that soul that's under conviction begins to pray. And begins to repent. And begins to confess.
- [14 : 09] And begins to try and get rid of sin. And this was what happened to the great Martin Luther. He would confess in exact detail his sins for as long as six hours at a time.
- If ever a monk, he said, could get to heaven through monastic discipline, I should have entered in. Get rid of my sins. Get rid of my sins. Be sorry for my sins.
- And God will accept me. Repent of my sins. And then I will be accepted. So what does Mr Luther need to hear? What does he need to know?
- Well, he needs to hear the negative. Just like Mrs Jones. He needs to be told that your prayers will not get you to heaven. That your repentance will not get you to heaven.
- That your tears will not get you to heaven. But he also needs to hear the good news. And what's the good news for Mr Luther?
- [15 : 11] Well, the good news for Mr Luther is this. You don't need to be rid of your sins before you are right with God. God makes men who are sinners right with himself.
- You can be a justified man and a practicing sinner at the same time. That's the glorious good news that he needs to hear.
- You can be a justified man and a practicing sinner at the same time. Justification is enough for God's free grace.
- At the very moment that God acquits you in the court of heaven, you're still a sinner. And you'll be a sinner as long as you live in this life.
- And that's the news that Mr Luther needs to hear. And you say, what a dangerous doctrine. A doctrine that's liable to be abused.
- [16 : 24] Yes indeed, it was abused in the New Testament. It was abused at the time of the Reformation. But you see, there's no other doctrine. There's no other truth.
- And you must remember the very faith that justifies us. The very faith that's the instrument of justification. It's a faith that unites us to Christ.
- And united to Christ, we are being sanctified. And we will ultimately be glorified. And so therefore, that's how a man who is justified by faith is also a man who loves Christ.
- And who hates sin and seeks to be rid of sin. But you see, this is the only answer. This is the good news for the convicted man. What did Martin Luther say when it first dawned upon him?
- At this I straightway felt myself born afresh. And to have entered through the open gate into paradise itself.
- [17 : 33] A discovery that you do not get rid of your sins before you are justified. But God justifies the ungodly who believe in Jesus.
- That's the good news for him. Well, we'll come to the third category. I'll call this man because he's a good free church man.

I'll call him Mr. McCloud. And this man, Mr. McCloud, has been conversed. He's been saved. After a struggle, he's come to the knowledge of the truth.

He's come to see the glorious truth of justification by faith. And when he first saw that truth and the glory of it, he was on a real high.

He was full of joy. And he wanted to go out and tell it to everyone. He told it to his family. He began to witness. He was so mad. People thought he was off his head.

[18 : 33] He was so filled with this truth of justification by faith. But people were taking him to be mad. But you see, time has passed. Some of the joy has subsided.

The feel of the basis. He began to look at himself. And he wondered if there was something defective. He began to look at his faith.

And he wondered if it was real. He began to look at his experience. And he heard about the experience of others. And it didn't quite compare with the experience of others.

And so he began to strive for more conviction. For deeper experience. For more holiness. And so this man is in this position.

The Christian life for him is more beauty than delight. It's more bondage than liberty. His assurance fluctuates. His joy is rare.

[19 : 33] What does Mr. McLeod need to hear? What's the thing that's going to be good news for Mr. McLeod? Well, the good news for Mr. McLeod is this.

You need to go back to where you began. You need to go back to where you began. It's not your faith that saves you.

It's not your experience that counts. You've shifted the ground of your confidence. From Christ's work without you. You have shifted it to the Spirit's work within you.

You've shifted your faith from what Christ did for you. To what the Spirit is doing within you. And you're looking at yourself and your faith and your experience instead of looking at Christ.

Your rock is now your faith when your rock should be Christ. You're building upon your experience when you should be building upon Christ.

[20 : 40] Your rock is Christ, not your faith, not your experience. It doesn't depend on how you feel. It doesn't depend on what you've done.

It depends on a great objective fact that Christ died and that you have been justified by death. That you're righteous as God is righteous.

That you're accepted forever more and nothing can alter that fact. And that's the good news you see for someone who is within the body of the church.

Someone who's a Christian. Someone who's a member in the church of Christ. And he needs that good news because he's drifting. He's drifting from the moorings.

He's slipped off the rock. And he's no longer on that rock that is Christ as far as his experience is concerned. And you see for all these three categories, so different, yet the gospel is for each one of them good news.

[21 : 51] We declare unto you glad tidings. And a glad tidings is for every one of them. And you see by way of application, this is what gives life, vitality, joy, assurance, confidence, boldness to the Christian and to the church.

The health and witness of the church will be found to exist in direct proportion to which justification by faith is powerfully proclaimed and spiritually stimulated.

That will be the health and witness of the church. Do you want joy restored to your heart?

Well, believe this doctrine. Do you want boldness in your witness? Believe this truth. Do you want something positive to live for?

And something positive to proclaim? Have you ever heard anyone who doesn't accept this doctrine? Who doesn't believe in justification by faith?

[23 : 07] Saying positively, I'm in a right relationship with God and I'm going to heaven. The best they can hope for is that what they secretly hope will come true.

But you can't say anything positive. They haven't got a positive gospel. They haven't got something to proclaim. But you see, this gospel is a positive gospel.

James Denny, a theologian, made a very telling observation. He said, as far as assurance of salvation is concerned, the Roman church regards it as presumption.

You must never say you're assured of salvation that you're going to heaven. That's presumption. The Protestant faith regarded it as a privilege and a duty.

Not everyone has assurance. It's a privilege to have it. You should seek it, but you may not have it. The New Testament says that assurance is a fact.

[24 : 12] It's a simple fact. And we've lost the glory of the New Testament. That assurance of salvation is a fact if we're justified by the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's a very sad figure in history, E.B. Peacet. He was an Anglican and he was one of the leaders of the Taktarian movement, the Oxford movement, that went towards the Church of Rome.

And one person writing about him, states this, The absence of joy in his religious life was only the inevitable effect of his concept of God's message of saving men.

In parting with the Lutheran truth concerning justification by faith, he parted with the springs of gladness. He was a devout man in many ways.

He was a great man in many ways. And yet his life was marked by sadness. Because he departed from the doctrine of justification by faith.

[25 : 18] And parting from that, he parted from the streams of gladness. And if we're going to recover gladness, and if we're going to recover joy, and if we're going to recover confidence and strength, then we've got to get back to this doctrine.

You see, the man who is justified, you could say, is a man who has looked God in the faith, and he's lived. And he's looked the day of judgment in the faith, and he's lived.

Because the doctrine of justification by faith is a pronouncement of the judgment day before it comes. So this man who has looked God in the faith, and has looked judgment in the faith, He's the man who's going to be bold for his God, and not fear the faith of man, and not fear what people think.

And that's what made the early Christians so bold, and so fearless. And that's what made the reformers. How could they have turned the world upside down if they didn't believe this?

How could they have overthrown the might of Rome if they didn't know this doctrine? That we are acquitted completely and entirely by free grace, by the free grace of God.

[26 : 36] That's where we get our joy. That's where we get our gladness. That's where we get our strength. But then the second thing, and the thing I began with, that this gospel is for everyone.

You see, it's the same gospel, and as I try to illustrate, it's relevant to everyone. It's as relevant for the lady doing the flowers as for the alcoholic.

It's as relevant for the person who's respectable as for the person who's in the gutter. It's the same gospel that has come as good news for everyone.

You see, modern evangelism has presented a God who fills the gaps. It's sometimes described as the God of the gaps.

Go with this gospel to the lonely. Go with this gospel to those who are fearful. Go with this gospel to those who are worrying. Go with this gospel to those who have no aim in life.

[27 : 42] The God of the gaps. But you see, that is presenting God as a kind of panacea for man's ill. That's not the gospel. Man's basic need is not his loneliness.

Man's basic need is not his worry, not his fear. They all come from a wrong relationship with God. So the relevancy for man is what can put him in a right relationship with God.

That's the most relevant thing you can hear today. Whatever class, whatever category you're in, the most relevant thing you can hear today is what can put me right with God.

How can I be restored to a right relationship with God? And you see, this is it. And this is what telling the good news is. One hungry beggar telling another hungry beggar where to find food.

And that's all we can do. We've found the food ourselves. We've found the good news. We go out with it. Tell others about it. Because they're all in the same position. We have got no advantage over us.

[28 : 53] Or no advantage over anyone. Those who are sophisticated and self-satisfied are as needy as those who are lonely and worried and anxious.

And it all comes from a wrong relationship with God. So the gospel that tells me how to be right with God is the relevant gospel and the only gospel that I need to hear.

And the gospel that we need to hear, every one of us. So this is how this gospel is for everyone. We declare unto you blood tidings.

Good news for church people, for those outside the church, for the world. It's all the same. He had known unto you, says Paul, to these people, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.

And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the lost Moses. The glory is good news.

[29 : 58] But then he goes on in verse 40 to say, Beware lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets. Behold, ye despise her, and wonder and perish.

For I worked a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, so a man declare it unto you. The terrible thing is this. If you reject that glorious good news.

If you despise it. If you turn away from it. What a tragedy. What an end will be. If having heard the good news, you refuse it.

But today you hear it. May it be to you as good news from a far country, as water to a thirsty soul. May God bless America.