

Bad News & Good News

A man receives a telephone call from his doctor. The doctor says: "About these medical tests we did, I have some good news and some bad news." The man asks for the good news first." The good news is that you have 24 hours to live," says the doctor. The man said incredulously, "If that is the good news, then what is the bad news?" "Well, ah, I kind of forgot to call you yesterday with the bad news! Oops! My bad!"

The humorous story above represents a type of joke that is common today: "I have some good news and I have some bad news. Which do you want to hear first?" We hear a lot of bad news. How about some good news? Wouldn't it be nice to turn on the news at suppertime and hear something good? How about gas prices back down to a \$1.19 a gallon? When you get the test results from the MRI exam you just had, you want to hear that everything was fine. Everyone loves good news!

Well, God has sent us some Good News; it is called the Gospel. One of the most frequently used phrases in Christian circles is "the gospel." Amazingly, few adults know what this term means. The term "gospel" comes from the Greek euaggelion literally meaning "good news" or "good tidings." Kittel defines it as "a technical term for 'news of victory.'" When the runner Phidippides returned from the battle of Marathon, the cry he brought was that of euaggelion-the proclamation of victory. "The messenger appears, raises his right hand in greeting and calls out with a loud voice...By this appearance it is known already that he brings good news. His face shines, his spear is decked with laurel, his head is crowned, he swings a branch of palms, joy fills the city..." (Kittel, 2:722).

Part of the meaning of the term "gospel" is "the reward of good tidings" (Liddell-Scott). Any messenger who brought good tidings was due a reward for the news he proclaimed. Paul describes preachers of the Gospel quoting from Isaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15).

The etymology of our English word "gospel" is a compound of two Anglo-Saxon words: god referring to "God" and spel meaning "tidings or story". The Bible is all about good news coming from God throughout the ages.

What does the Gospel involve? Obviously, the Good News includes facts that must be believed, such as, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Next, it involves commands that must be obeyed, such as, repent, confess, and be baptized. Baptism results in the forgiveness of sins. Although this is great news for those suffering with the burden of guilt caused by their sins, the Gospel does not leave the new born Christian on the shores of salvation dripping wet. Obeying the Gospel means being baptized and everything leading up to that moment. However, we must never stop obeying the Gospel. We must live in subjection to it (2 Cor. 9:13) and adhere to the truth of the Gospel (Gal. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:13). "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ...with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The Gospel encompasses all the doctrines (teachings) of Jesus and His Apostles and Prophets. Good News from God includes promises we will receive, such as, the remission of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and hope in eternal life (Col. 1:5). Finally, the Gospel includes warnings we must heed. Paul shared the Gospel with Governor Felix. "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient

time I will call for you” (Acts 24:25). In his sermon to the Athenians Paul warned “because he [God] has appointed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). The Gospel includes the warning of the Second Coming of Christ. When “ the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

On a slave galley, the slave-master told the chained slaves rowing the oars, “Men I have some good news and bad news. First, the good news: we will have extra rations for lunch and a 30-minute nap.” Everyone was excited. This was the best news in years. Then the slave-master added, “The bad news is the ship’s captain wants to go water skiing this afternoon.”

In dealing with the Gospel, we are going to reverse the order: first the bad news then good news. Sometimes to appreciate the good news, you have to see it in light of the bad news. For example, “As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country” (Prov. 25:25). Only a thirsty soul can truly appreciate cold waters. Consider the many examples which follow:

- “... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).
- “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).
- “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy...” (1 Tim. 1:13).
- “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb. 10:4).
- “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:6,7).
- “You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God...For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:21,22).
- “The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).
- “...but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Rev. 21:27).

Yes, bad news is bad, but the good news is even better.

It is true there are four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Yet, these are but different accounts of the life of Christ. When you boil it all down, there really is only one true Gospel. Although there are different denominations, they do not all teach the same thing. Contrary to Paul’s teaching they preach a different Gospel. “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6-10).

What are these other gospels? Surely, losing your life in a fiery compound in Waco, Texas,

is not the Good News from Christ, but the false gospel of David Koresh. Over 900 people drinking cyanide laced kool-aid out of a bathtub in Jonestown, Guyana, is not the preaching of the Gospel, rather it is the perverted doctrine of Jim Jones. Remember the Heaven's Gate cult who longed to be beamed up by the aliens traveling in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet in 1997? They were sincere in their belief that this was the good news of salvation, but they committed suicide in vain. Neither Paul nor the other apostles preached the good news the Baptist Gospel, or the good news of Mormonism, or the glad tidings from the Jehovah's Witnesses, or teachings of the Methodists. The Gospel is only what is taught in the New Testament, nothing more, nothing less and nothing else.

The best news about the Good News: "...it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes ..." (Rom. 1:16).

– Daniel R. Vess, The Forum, September 9, 2007