

# What is the gospel?

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Seminar led by Drs Ngozi Okeke & Mark Thompson

*The gospel is the life-transforming message of salvation from sin and all its consequences through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is both a declaration and a summons: announcing what has been done for us in Christ and calling us to repentance, faith and submission to his lordship. 'Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, was buried and was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures'.<sup>1</sup> Jesus himself proclaimed 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel'.<sup>2</sup>*

This gospel finds its ultimate ground in the character of the triune God, his perfect love and holiness. God will not ignore human sin. Sin leads to God's just and holy wrath and the awful reality of hell. The grave consequences of sin — guilt before God and the judgment to come, enslavement to sin and Satan, corruption and death — all must be dealt with. We cannot deal with those consequences ourselves, in part or in whole. In this light, God's determined love expressed itself most clearly when the Father sent his Son in the power of the Spirit to be the Savior of the world.<sup>3</sup> 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'.<sup>4</sup> 'God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'.<sup>5</sup>

The gospel announces the work of the triune God. The Son came to do the Father's will in the power of the Spirit. By the Spirit he was incarnate in Mary's womb in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, becoming genuinely one of us while remaining truly God.<sup>6</sup> He was made like us in every way, sin excepted.<sup>7</sup> At the same time he is the unique Son of God, the only Savior of the world. He lived the perfect life that none of us can live, always doing the will of the Father who sent him.<sup>8</sup> He died for our sins and was raised for our justification, always in perfect unity with the Father and the Spirit. 'For Christ also

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:14

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:14

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:35

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 4:15

<sup>8</sup> John 6:38; 8:28-29

suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit ...<sup>9</sup>

The gospel, the proclamation of what God has done in Christ, is the powerful means by which God saves men and women today.<sup>10</sup> As the gospel is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit enables us to trust in God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life. Faith, genuine repentance and a transformed life are evidence that the gospel has been at work. Because Christ has died and been raised from the grave we cannot continue as before. In response to God's mercy in saving us, we are called to be obedient, to stand as Christ's faithful people in the world. We recognize that we now belong to the one who sanctified his people through his own blood.<sup>11</sup> Having died to sin in Christ we cannot continue to live in it.<sup>12</sup> As those rescued by Christ, our thinking and our behavior must be determined by his will expressed in his authoritative written word. Yet this new life of faith and obedience is never a human achievement. We are saved only through faith in Christ alone and even our faith is a gift of God.<sup>13</sup> We have been brought from death to life by Jesus and the life he gives us is life as it was meant to be, life to the full.<sup>14</sup> It is a life characterized by trust in God's goodness, love of God and of our neighbor, and hope in the midst of suffering, looking forward to that day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.<sup>15</sup> On that day, God's redeemed people will enjoy his presence in a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.<sup>16</sup> In the meantime, his service is perfect freedom.

The gospel announces God's great victory and the fulfillment of his ancient promises in Christ.<sup>17</sup> Sin and the powers that stand behind it are defeated.<sup>18</sup> Judgment is exhausted so that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Death has been overturned by the one who is the resurrection and the life.<sup>20</sup> Exalted to the right hand of the Father, he pours out his Spirit on the church, equipping it powerfully to worship, to witness by word and deed to the gospel of God, which always remains the gospel concerning his Son.<sup>21</sup> This same gospel, proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles, is our message in every age to a broken world of lost men and women who can be rescued only by Jesus, the crucified but risen Savior and Lord of all. It is in the faithful proclamation of the gospel, and in the living of lives that have been transformed by it, that we give God the glory that is his due.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21

<sup>10</sup> Romans 1:16–17

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 13:12

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6:2

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 2:8–9

<sup>14</sup> John 10:10

<sup>15</sup> Philippians 2:9–10

<sup>16</sup> 2 Peter 3:13

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53:5–6

<sup>18</sup> Colossians 2:13–15

<sup>19</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>20</sup> John 11:25

<sup>21</sup> Acts 2:33; Romans 1:1–3