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Andrew M. Davis Sermon

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## **The Gospel Seed**

### **Mark 16:15-16**

What is the greatest issue facing the human race? I suppose if you asked that question all over the world, you might get different answers. In Ukraine, the Russian invasion would dominate people's responses... as their cities have been laid waste and their lives have been shattered.

In Shanghai, it is the COVID lockdown, causing the already tyrannical Chinese Communist government to be even more authoritarian, quarantining millions for weeks in their homes; forcibly relocating hundreds of thousands to health centers where they are not free to leave.

Perhaps the most under-reported humanitarian crisis of our day is the famine in South Yemen. Most of you probably have heard absolutely nothing about it... Ukraine and COVID have dominated the headlines... but for the last six years, a civil war has shattered the nation and pushed millions to the brink of starvation.

At a much lesser level, a friend of mine in Abilene, Texas says that region has been fighting a wildfire that has been burning the dry vegetation near their city and is burning perilously near his home and that of his sister.

Many Americans would answer the skyrocketing cost of living in the worst inflation we've seen in forty years. Others would cite the baby formula supply chain crisis...

I could go on and on.

But as tragic or pressing as all of these are, not one of them is the answer to my question. The most pressing, most urgent, most consequential issue facing the human race today is lostness... living life under the wrath of a holy and omnipotent God. The danger of spending eternity in hell... that far outweighs all these other crises, and a thousand others besides. All of those are temporal... the loss of a human soul is eternal.

That includes the people who live right here in the Triangle area of North Carolina. And most tragically, because the lost people living around us have no faith, they don't see the imminent danger they are under every moment from the wrath of God. They don't know what will happen to them on Judgment Day. And they don't know the remedy that God has given to the human race – the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Friends, we Christians have the privilege of being the sowers of that eternal seed... the seed of the gospel! And how joyful are we when we see that seed take root in the heart of a repentant believing person!

This past week, I was at my Trustee meeting for the International Missions Board. My favorite part of those meetings is always the testimonies of faith we hear from distant mission field. One of the mission leaders told about a Muslim woman in Indonesia, a highly educated professor. This woman had the same dream for seven consecutive nights. In this dream, she saw herself on one side of a locked door, and Jesus Christ on the other. She knew she was on the outside and desperately wanted to get in but didn't know how. After seven straight nights of this same dream, she was powerfully led to find a Christian woman she knew and told her about the dream. The woman shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with her, and led her to faith. That night, she had a different dream. She saw herself approaching the same door, but this time Jesus Christ opened the door and she went through it into the most beautiful world she had ever seen – a world of lavish natural beauty.

She began to live her faith in Christ boldly and courageously. But her family savagely persecuted her. Her mother slapped her in the face and told her, "If you don't renounce your faith in Christ, you can no longer be our daughter!" She said, "I would rather lose my parents than my Savior!"

Isn't it incredible that we get to plant the timeless and eternal seed of the gospel in hearts like that?!

We are making our way through this glorious Gospel of Mark...

The central theme is stated in the very first verse:

***Mark 1:1 The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.***

That Jesus is the Son of God is the essence of the good news, especially when we understand that he came to earth to save sinners from their sin.

Essential to that good news, that gospel, is the understanding of sin as rebellion against God the King. So as Jesus begins his public ministry, he gives this timeless call:

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

Soon after that, he begins recruiting people to join him in spreading this gospel:

***Mark 1:17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."***

By the end of the Gospel of Mark, after he has died for sins and risen from the dead, he sends his disciples out to change the world:

***Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. <sup>16</sup> Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.***

Now, in our study of the Gospel of Mark, we have come to the great chapter 4... and the Parable of the Seed and the Soils.

We have said the focus is on the soils as representing four different human responses to the gospel... the hardened path represents those who hear the word and immediately disregard it; the stony ground represents those who hear the word and initially respond with joy, but when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The thorny soil represents those who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the last soil represents those with a noble and good heart who hear the word, understand it, and by perseverance produce a harvest... 30, 60, or 100 times what was sown.

When I first preached on that parable several weeks ago, I said "Just because someone hears the word and rejects it doesn't mean that we are preaching the wrong message or that something drastic needs to change." I said there is a temptation to re-engineer the seed of the word to make it popular.

Years ago, I saw during a Presidential election season a debate with the leading candidates. The network had gathered a "focus group" of likely voters from various political perspectives. They were given a device to hold in their hands while they listened to the debate and its various moments. They could turn the knob on the device in one direction for a positive response, and in the opposite direction for a negative response to what was being said. The more they went in one direction or the other, the stronger was their reaction... very strongly positive all the way down to very strongly negative. A colored line representing their responses over the hour-long debate traced out on the screen for all the members of the focus group. This way both candidates (and the nation) could get a sense of the popular response to every moment and every detail of the presentation the candidates were each making.

I would imagine the camps from both the candidates would be very interested in "tailoring" their message to meet popular responses. To "re-engineer" their message, their "talking points" to hit maximum favorability among the voters.

Friends, that is the very thing we must NEVER DO with the gospel message. It has come to us timeless from heaven itself... and it is guaranteed that most of the people we preach it to will reject it. But we cannot take it back into the lab of our imaginations and re-engineer the seed of the word.

Paul said:

***Galatians 1:11-12 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.***

And earlier:

***Galatians 1:6-9 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- <sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!***

The Galatian false teachers were “re-engineering” the gospel seed... trying to change its basic message. But Paul said when we do that, we are preaching something that is no gospel at all.

In every generation of church history, false teachers have “re-engineered” the gospel, turning it into a man-made gospel that is no gospel at all. They take the seed of the gospel found in the New Testament, bring it into the laboratory of their own imaginations and re-engineer its message.

If we are going to be faithful to the Lord, we must preach the true gospel. We have to sow the GOOD SEED of the eternal gospel

This morning, I want to walk through the basic outline of the gospel message we have published in your bulletin for many weeks now. It has a four-part outline, God-Man-Christ-Response.

I know there are many good and healthy ways to summarize the gospel message... but I contend that, whether you use this detailed outline I am presenting today or not, if you want to preach the true gospel, you will give biblical truth about God, about man and his condition, about Jesus Christ, and you will call for a response of repentance and faith.

## I. Central to Evangelism: Getting the Gospel Message Right

### A. Biblical Evangelism is Not About Technique

1. So easy to think evangelism training is all about tactics/techniques like learning to sell insurance from the leading insurance salesman of the year
2. NO... in the end, evangelism is a rescue mission in which we are seeking to resuscitate spiritually dead people—like giving mouth to mouth and performing CPR to a person lying unconscious and turning blue next to a pool he has just been pulled out from... HE NEEDS AIR and HE NEEDS HIS HEART BEATING
3. In a much deeper way, the people we are seeking to reach with the gospel need to be raised from the dead spiritually:
4. Only the gospel has the power to do this

### B. Clear Verse on the Power of the Gospel

***Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes***

### C. The Need for Constant Reminders

***1 Corinthians 15:1-2 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.***

1. First... because it is vital that each of you has believed the gospel himself/herself

2. Second... because the more the evangelists themselves have drunk in the sweetness of the gospel, the more effective evangelists you will be
3. Third... because you are never done with the gospel message: Tim Keller: “We never get beyond the gospel in our Christian life to something more advanced. ... The gospel is not the A-B-C’s of Christianity, but the A to Z of Christianity.”
4. Fourth... because we tend to forget the gospel message, and need constant reminders
5. Fifth... because there is a difference between recognizing the gospel when you hear it, and being able to speak a clear summary of it yourself for others
6. Sixth... we must keep hearing the true gospel so we can PROTECT OURSELVES FROM DRIFTING FROM IT... both individually and as a church

***Hebrews 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.***

SO... we must keep immersing our minds in the gospel message...

Church-wide goal:

We are asking God for an outpouring of the Spirit resulting in a durable culture of evangelism as demonstrated by consistent patterns of bold and creative evangelism resulting in people being converted to genuine faith in Christ.

## II. God-Man-Christ-Response

### A. Simple Four-Part Outline of the Gospel

God... Man... Christ... Response

### B. Outline Unfolded a Little Broader

#### 1. God: Four Offices

a. Creator

- b. King
- c. Lawgiver
- d. Judge

## 2. Man

- a. Created by God the Creator
- b. Rebellious against God the King
- c. Transgressor of God's Laws
- d. Under Judgment by God the Judge

## 3. Christ

- a. God's Fifth Office: Savior
- b. Jesus' Supernatural life
  - i) God-Man
  - ii) Miracles
  - iii) Sinlessness
- c. Jesus' Substitutionary Death
- d. Jesus' Saving Resurrection
- e. Jesus' Salvation Gifts
  - i) Forgiveness of sins
  - ii) Eternal life: both now and forever

## 4. Response

- a. What you must DO: repent and believe
- b. What you must NOT DO: work for it or wait for it

### **God:**

- God is Creator

***Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***



- God is King

*Psalm 47:7 For God is the King of all the earth*

- God is Lawgiver

10 Commandments + 2 Commandments

Ten Commandments:

- 1) You shall have no other gods
- 2) You shall not make or worship idols
- 3) You shall not take the Name of the Lord in vain
- 4) Keep the Sabbath day holy
- 5) Honor your father and mother
- 6) You shall not murder [and anger is the root of all murder]
- 7) You shall not commit adultery [and lust is adultery in your heart]
- 8) You shall not steal
- 9) You shall not bear false witness
- 10) You shall not covet anything

Two Commandments:

- 1) You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
- 2) You shall love your neighbor as yourself

- God is Judge

*Psalm 96:13 the LORD... comes to judge the earth.*

Therefore, God is holy

*Habakkuk 1:13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.*

**Man:**

- Man is Created by God the Creator : Genesis 1:27

*Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Created to be like God, to know/love God, to serve God

- Man is Rebellious Against God the King

Universally Rebellious: Romans 3:10-12

***Romans 3:10-12 “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”***

Rebellious Against God’s Laws: 10 + 2 Commandments

- Man is Under Judgment by God the Judge

Judgment Day

***Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.***

Judgment Penalty

***Romans 6:23 ... the wages of sin is death... ETERNITY IN HELL***

First Key Question: How can a sinful person enter heaven where God allows no sin?

**Christ:**

- God’s Fifth Title—Savior

Saved from what?

***Matthew 1:21 “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”***

- Jesus’ Supernatural Life

God-man

***John 1:1, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.***

Miraculous

***Matthew 11:5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.***

Sinless

***1 Peter 2:22 “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”***

- Jesus’ Substitutionary Death

***1 Peter 2:24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.***

***2 Corinthians 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.***

- Jesus’ Saving Resurrection

***1 Corinthians 15:3-5 Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.***

- Jesus’ Salvation Gifts

Total Forgiveness of Sins

***Ephesians 1:7 In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace***

Eternal Life

***Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

**Response:**

**CALL FOR A RESPONSE!!**

***Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."***

- Key Question

*Acts 16:30 "What must I do to be saved?"*

- What You Must DO:

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

Repent: U-Turn: Away from sin; Toward God

Believe the gospel: Believe THAT it's true; Believe IN Christ

- **What You Must NOT DO:**

Do Not Work For It

*Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Do Not Wait For Tomorrow

*2 Corinthians 6:2 I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*

*Eternal Life Now (on earth)*

New Creation by the Creator

*2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

**Eternal Life Forever (in heaven)**

*John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

**CALL FOR A RESPONSE!!!** Closing Question (Mack Stiles):

“You know, I think that this is an urgent matter in your life. I think that you understand the gospel, and really what is left is for you to place your complete faith and trust in Christ. **WHAT IS STOPPING YOU FROM DOING THAT?**”

And wait for their answer!!

### III. Application

A. Come to Christ

B. Drink in the Gospel Again for Your Own Vitality

C. Ask Yourself These Three Diagnostic Questions

1. Do I know the gospel?

2. Do I live the gospel?

3. Do I speak the gospel?

D. Pray for God to Give You BOLDNESS to Share the Gospel

1. Paul asked for boldness and clarity

***Ephesians 6:20 Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.***

***Colossians 4:4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.***

2. Get some people to pray for you to have boldness to share the gospel with someone

E. Pray for God to Give You Opportunities to Share a Gospel Outline with Someone

F. TAKE ACTION [Mack Stiles]

1. Do a “body check”: check your head—is the gospel on your mind throughout the day; check your gut—are you willing to be bold in the face of your fears? Check your feet: Are you willing to move out into a hostile world to speak the truth? Are you willing to go where unbelievers are to meet them and know them and eventually share with them?

2. Pray: and pray again... pray for yourself; pray for lost people you know;

3. Plan: look at your life ahead... vacations, business trips, this week’s schedule; ask the Lord to go ahead of you to prepare witnessing opportunities

4. Think: think through issues that unbelievers are likely to raise... think about how you would answer them;
5. Prepare: memorize this outline
6. Get started: do you have a hobby you enjoy??? Connect with other like-minded people; have lunch with people; get involved in a sports league with unbelievers; be bold in conversation: “What spiritual interests do you have?” “What is your spiritual background?” LISTEN
7. Gather: with other Christians to pray specifically for people you’d like to bring to faith in Christ; gather with non-Christians to do four-week investigative Bible studies in the Gospel of Mark
8. Serve: find ways to bless people in your neighborhood, workplace, community
9. Invite: be hospitable... invite lost people into your home
10. Pursue: don’t ever give up... keep trying ways to reach out