

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *The PURPOSE of the Gospel*

SERIES: *What is the Gospel?*

SCRIPTURES: *Revelation 21; 2 Peter 1; 2 Peter 3*

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**Credit to Bible Gateway; Scott McKnight; The Lost World of Adam & Eve by NT Wright; Book called Re-Union.*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church, to everyone here in the room and also to those of you tuning in to the livestream.

Today we're finishing up our series titled: **What is the Gospel?**

We're talking about this because, as followers of Jesus, how we answer that question has a big impact on how we end up living our lives. And because many of us have settled for a piece of the Gospel, but not the fullness of the Gospel.

So, in this series we've clarified what is **the heart of the Gospel...it's Jesus**. And second, what are **two of the gifts of the Gospel: Jesus demonstrates God's unconditional love** and **he saves us from sin**. Today, I want to talk about

I. The PURPOSE of the Gospel.

What is the end to which the Gospel is taking us?

If I were to ask a group of Christians what the purpose of the Gospel is they might say something like, **"To get us into heaven when we die."** The emphasis would be about "a future time and place." And probably thought about as some kind of future

spiritual existence. And this wouldn't be entirely wrong. The Biblical writers do use the term "heaven" to speak about the future destiny of those who follow Christ.

But the Bible also give us clues that what we call heaven is less about a place we go and more about being in the presence of a Person. Heaven often is shorthand for eternal life lived within God's life.

For example, when we read descriptions of heaven in the book of **Revelation**, John (the author) describes what he sees in vivid symbolic detail. A heavenly city...with streets of gold and pearly gates. But in the middle of describing this heavenly city John says something else very revealing:

Revelation 21 - ²² I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

In the ancient world, a temple is a place where a deity's presence is thought to dwell in some special way. But John doesn't say that heaven is the temple where we will meet God. Instead, he says, that God himself actually is the temple! And in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6) Paul says that your body becomes the temple where God's Holy Spirit dwells. Hinting to us that what we call heaven means something like: **eternal life with God.**

This brings us to what I believe are two of the primary purposes of the Gospel.

First is that through Jesus we can experience...

A. Life with God

Scripture tells us that the

1. Original Design

for humanity is life in God's presence. Go the whole way back to the first book of the Bible and Genesis 3 seems to indicate that God was in the habit of making his presence available to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:8 - ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day,

And while we may not necessarily believe that God was literally walking in the garden...because there all kinds of questions about what it would mean for God to walk when he doesn't have a physical body...The original created garden is a picture of intimate closeness and fellowship, between God and humans. *This idea of walking in the garden is used as an expression of God's presence among his people.* (Toews The Story of Original Sin pg. 7)

Speaking about God, Luke the writer of the book of Acts, quotes an ancient Greek philosopher Epimedes...who said, **"In him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17)** It's an image of an interlocking of our lives with God.

The epic Star Wars saga, hints at this concept when it talks about the "FORCE". **Yoda (PIC)**, speaking to his trainee Luke Skywalker says, ***"My Ally is the Force and a powerful ally it is...It's energy surrounds us, and binds us...You must feel the force around you – here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere."*** It is hinting at the concept of close interlocking connection, between humanity and a higher power. But the reality is much better than the FORCE in Star Wars...because, Scripture tells us that this Force is personal and relational. You were designed to live in fellowship with it. Peter describes it like this:

2 Peter 1:3-4 - ³ His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life...so that...you may participate in the divine nature...

Participation in the divine nature...God wants to share his life with us...that's how we were made, created, designed...the purpose of the Gospel is to bring us back into intimacy with God. That's how we should think about "heaven." Not mostly as a place we go, but reunited with God.

But as we talked about last week, humanity wandered away, hid because we wanted life our own way...separation from God.

Now, one of the ways that we experience this reunion with God, is called...

2. Resurrection

Every year, Christians gather on Easter Sunday to celebrate what we call the resurrection of Jesus.

One author writes that, The resurrection was like God's great exclamation point validating Jesus as the true Messiah and Lord. Because of the resurrection, Jesus message and mission, stand forever authorized and endorsed by God. It's like the voice at the end of one of those political ads: **"I am Yahweh and I approve this message."**

But Jesus resurrection did more than just validate Jesus as the true Messiah. It showed a glimpse of God's purpose for the future. The end to which the Gospel is taking us. And it wasn't whisking us away, to some other world.

The Apostle Paul taught that Jesus' resurrection was a prototype of what all followers of Jesus will one day experience...

1 Corinthians 15 - ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

What this means is that heaven, or eternal life is not mostly some spiritual world of existence that we will be transported into, at the end of time. Remember on Easter morning the tomb was empty. Jesus physical body was gone, but it wasn't abandoned. It was changed, but it was still some kind of physical existence. People saw Jesus and touched Jesus. This is why at the end of his time on earth, Jesus didn't just disappear or fade away or become some invisible spirit. Jesus remained embodied as he returned to the Father.

The resurrection demonstrated that God's purpose isn't to abandon this world and our bodies. When God created the physical world, including our bodies, he said it was very good. Your body is good. Maybe not perfect. Maybe not totally healthy. But good. Not shameful, not evil, not disposable. God cares about the kinds of things you do with your physical body.

Now we know that whether through decomposition or cremation, as morbid as that sounds, our physical bodies as they currently are will not last, but we also believe, because of resurrection, they won't be forsaken or discarded. Resurrection tells us, that God intends to redeem and renew them.

Even the world, all of creation, will not be discarded it will be redeemed, renewed.

Romans 8:21 - creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We don't know exactly how what we do here and now will impact the new heaven and the new earth, but there does seem to be some kind of relationship between the two.

“Humans are redeemed to get God's original creation project back on track.”

(NT Wright)

There's a lot of misunderstanding about this among Christians today...about the earth and where it is headed. I don't think it's intentional, I just think we are unaware.

There are many Christians who assume or imagine, that at the end of time when Christ returns, the earth is going to get all burned up and we Christians will be sucked out of this world into another one.

It comes from passages like this one in **2 Peter 3** – ¹⁰ **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.**^[a]

“See, it’s all gonna burn anyway.” That is a misunderstanding of what Peter is actually saying here and it happens at other places in Scripture. Two thoughts for you as you think about passages like this...

Notice the word “**destroyed**”. It’s important to realize that Peter has just used this same word a few sentences earlier, comparing the destruction of the “elements” to the destruction of the great flood. The story of Noah and the Ark.

“By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire”

In other words, in the same way that the earth was destroyed in the flood so also it will be destroyed by fire, at the end of time. It’s important to remember that the flood didn’t dispose of the earth. Instead it was a purifying flood “ridding the earth” or “washing the earth clean of evil.”

Peter says, in a similar manner the earth will be “destroyed”...it doesn’t necessarily mean disposed of, the idea is “purged” or “purified of evil” at the end of time. It will be made like new, or renewed!

Second, this last little phrase here is where some of the other confusion comes from. This is the NIV version says **“the earth will be laid bare.”**

But the KJV uses a different phrase, it says the earth will be **“burned up.”** Many scholars today agree that the phrase “burned up” is not the most accurate rendering of the Greek. Which is why if you look at other modern versions they use phrases like **“disclosed”** NRSV ... ESV **“exposed”**... the Greek word itself means something more literally like **“found out”**... the idea being that “the earth will be found for what it truly is.”

Many people started taking that KJV translation literally and that the earth will be incinerated. But again, the concept Peter seems to be talking about here is a purifying fire, that exposes something for what it truly is...the kind of fire that “melts away the dross and impurities” to purify the metal.

Resurrection is a reminder that God’s purpose, is not to dispose of the earth and throw it in the cosmic garbage can...rather he intends to purify it, renew it, redeem it. That’s why at the culmination of history, the New Jerusalem (heaven) comes down to earth... this is [Revelation 21](#) -

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”^[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

The idea here is that, God will renew all things. And this is the purpose of the Gospel. When we participate...through our words, actions, in our relationship, in creation...in such a way that fosters life, renewal, healing, creativity we are participating in eternal life with God here and now. When we are

participate...through our words, actions, in our relations, in creation...in ways that are destructive we are working against the heart of the Gospel.

Life with God through resurrection...is what leads to the second purpose of the gospel and that is ultimately our...

B. Transformation

Again for many people the purpose of the Gospel has become synonymous with “going to heaven when I die.” But the purpose of the gospel isn’t so much about a place I go but the kind of person I become.

Dallas Willard says, **“The Gospel is less about how to get into the Kingdom of Heaven after you die, and more about how to live in the Kingdom of Heaven before you die.”**

The Apostle Paul said it like this...

2 Corinthians 5 - 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

A couple of years ago, my wife, Jenny noticed some of these **caterpillars (PIC)** on the plants out in our garden. We weren’t exactly sure what they were at first, so she went and looked them up online and we discovered these particular caterpillars turn into butterflies.

We wanted to watch this transformation happen. So, she collected a few and over the next few days we watched as they made their cocoons, hibernated and morphed until one day those gross, slimy looking caterpillars emerged as beautiful **butterflies**.

This is the kind of transformation we can think about when we think about this second purpose of the “gospel”. I become a changed person...like Paul says, “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.”

One way that the Bible talks about this transformation idea is to say that we become **“citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.”**

The idea of a kingdom was an important concept for Jesus. He often said things like, **“The Kingdom of Heaven has come near. Repent and believe the good news.”** (Mark 1:15).

Now in our day we often think of a Kingdom as something like a nation, with physical borders and boundary markers. Lines on a map. But the Kingdom of Heaven is a different kind of Kingdom. It’s not a physical place you go to or a plot of land, though we do live out God’s Kingdom in the physical world.

The kingdom of God is a way of living that reflects that Jesus is our Lord. This is why the Kingdom of Heaven isn’t contained by any earthly borders, or nations but has representatives all across the world. The Kingdom of Heaven includes, Americans who follow Jesus. Also, Africans, Asians, Europeans... Luke says,

Luke 17 - ²⁰ Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, ²¹ nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

The original Greek means, the Kingdom of God is **“within you”** or inside you. And the word “your” is plural. Kind of like our expression, “y’all”. Jesus is saying the Kingdom of God is inside all y’all together who follow Jesus.

So, we may be citizens of the country in which we are living, but as Christians we are less citizens and more like ambassadors. Our true citizenship is with all those who follow Jesus. Paul said it like this when he chose to join Jesus Kingdom...

“I have been crucified with Christ, I no longer live but Christ lives in me.

What this means is that as a citizen of Jesus Kingdom...**my lifestyle changes to match the culture of the Kingdom of Heaven.** How do we know what the Kingdom of Heaven lifestyle is? We look at Jesus, God’s representative on earth. His life and teachings and we start to imitate that lifestyle. This is why we emphasize so much Jesus’ teaching in **the Sermon on the Mount.** We believe this is a little bit like the Constitution of Jesus Kingdom.

You have heard do not murder, but I say, do not get angry.

You have heard do not commit adultery, but I say do not lust.

You have heard love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say, love your enemy.

Does that make sense? We are changed/transformed into citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.

One more important note about this Kingdom of Heaven concept. Sometimes, even Christians will say, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is not yet here. It will come later, when Jesus returns for a second time.”* We tend to emphasize “heaven” as a future time and place. But that’s not how Jesus thought or talked about the Kingdom. While it’s true that the Kingdom of Heaven is not fully present and will reach a greater fullness when Christ returns. Jesus says that for his followers it starts right here, right now!

Mark 1:15 - ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

The Greek literally says “the Kingdom of God is **at hand.**” In other words, Jesus brings God’s Kingdom so close you can reach out and touch it, grab hold of it, enter into it.

Which is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray “your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus purpose was to bring up there...down here. That’s one of the purposes of the Gospel. We enter into citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven and live that lifestyle, as Christ’s representatives in the world!

And those are two of the primary purposes of the Gospel...Jesus saves us from sin so that we can experience transformed lives in God’s presence, here and now and on into eternity...and that sounds like really good news.

Of course all Kingdoms...nations...cultures have unique traditions. As Americans, for example, we celebrate the 4th of July, with the national anthem, fireworks and usually hot dogs and hamburgers. As members of the Kingdom of Heaven we also have some unique traditions. One of those is a practice called communion. And today, people all over the world, who are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven are participating in this tradition together.

It is through communion that we focus our full attention, our thoughts, our minds, our senses...on the heart of the Gospel...Jesus. And that’s how we want to close our service today.

Communion 8am service (Old Ritual):

And so, if you would please stand and join me and servers if you would please come and take your places down front.

Communion 9:45am Service (New Ritual):

I’m going to ask if the worship team would come forward. In just a moment we’re going to read our corporate prayer together, which will be on the screen behind me. When we are done reading, you can begin entering the two side-center aisle’s, walk down front...take bread and eat, juice and drink then make your way back to your seat.

There is gluten free bread, if you prefer that just ask when you get down front. You don't need to be in a hurry, rushing through your bread to get to the juice. We invite to take your time, eating your bread as you make your way through the line. You're not holding anyone up. But before we read our prayer together, I'd like us to just take a few moments to reflect on the Gospel as we turn our thoughts to Jesus.

The Gospel reminds us, first, that we were **created for a life of love, peace and joy in the presence of our great God.** Pause for moment, where today, this past week...have you experienced a life of joy, peace, and love? Just thank God that that moment is His desire, his purpose for you. (PAUSE)

The Gospel reminds us, also of **our sin.** Have you missed the mark recently, in your life, with your family, in a relationship, a bad habit, something you said? Take a moment and ask God for His forgiveness. "I am not all I know I should be." (PAUSE)

The Gospel reminds us that **Jesus saves us from our sin.** (For it is by grace you have been saved, this is not from yourself, it is the gift of God)...In solidarity Jesus allows us to claim his life and his victory over death as our own. Would you take a moment and thank Jesus for the life he lived and then think about the cross where he died for you? (PAUSE)

With the image of the cross in your mind, would please stand and join me. And servers if you would come and take your places up front. Let's read this prayer together.

"Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent, for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen"