

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *The Gifts of the Gospel*

SERIES: *What is the Gospel?*

SCRIPTURES:

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

Last week we started this series that is titled in the form of a question: **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 so often we are only getting an abbreviated version of the Gospel. We’re only telling part of the story.

Many Christians equate the **Gospel** with “**salvation**” or “the salvation formula”. And while salvation is a critical aspect of the Gospel, it’s only a part of the Gospel. There are several dangers with equating the fullness of the Gospel with salvation, we talked about those last week in the message, I’m not going to review them today. If you’d like to know what we talked about...you can watch last weeks message on our church website.

So we concluded last week by talking about, what is the heart or the center foundation of the Gospel: Jesus...his birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection.

This morning we want to talk about what are

I. The “gifts” of the Gospel.

If the word Gospel literally means “good news”...then what is that good news?

So let’s talk about two gifts of the Gospel.

First,

A. The Gospel shows us Gods love.

If this first gift of the Gospel had a newspaper headline it might be something like:

“Good News! God is like Jesus!”

And this is really important for us to internalize, because it can be cliché for us Christians to say thing like “God is love” or “No matter what happens, God is in control.” But let’s be honest this world tends to send us

1. Mixed Signals

about what kind of “FORCE” is at work behind the curtains of the universe.

Nature can be breathtakingly beautiful...a colorful sunset, a soft sandy beach, a full harvest from your garden...but it can also be tremendously cruel.

Just the other week, my daughter Ady and I were walking into the dentist’s office. And Ady stopped in her tracks. She said, “aww...” I turned as I asked “What’s the matter?”

A little bird was laying on the ground, just off the sidewalk, lifeless, in the beginning stages of the decaying process. Ady noticed it and it bothered her little heart to see the dead bird. It bothered my heart. It made me think of Jesus words that “Not a sparrow falls to the ground that God doesn’t know about.” But it also made me

wonder, why didn't God save this little sparrow? It's a cruel world. Baby birds don't always make it.

And of course, in nature, it's not just baby birds. Just a few weeks ago a horrendous earthquake hit **Morocco (IMAGE)** and catastrophic flooding in **Libya (IMAGE)**. Homes were obliterated and thousands of people left dead, under piles of rubble. Thousands without homes or access to aid and support. We've seen the effects of wild fires, it's hurricanes, it's disease, it's cancer. Nature might cause to wonder, if God is love.

And it's not just nature, the same is true of **human behavior**. We live in a world where human beings take advantage of and harm one another.

I think about this every time I see new images of the war between Ukraine and Russia. I think about this every time I witness the mudslinging between leaders from within the political parties of our own country. Demeaning and name-calling one another. I think about this every time I hear about bullying in schools or racism still happening in our communities. I think about this every time I lose my own patience with my family. I know this is not how humans are meant to live. It can send a contradictory message about a God of love.

And these mixed signals don't just stop at the natural world or at the harsh behavior of humans. Sometimes, when we look at the Bible, there can seem to be mixed messages. God seems infinitely loving one moment and excessively punishing the next. Sometimes he provides manna and water in the desert and a way across the Red Sea and at other times he destroys the world in a flood, calls on the destruction of nations...including men, women and children. That doesn't sound like a "good news" Gospel, does it?

These mixed signals may cause us to wonder about who God is and what He is really like.

How can we be certain that God is love? How can God show us most clearly what He is like? God's answer is: Jesus.

Jesus comes as God's clearest demonstration of his life and love. When we look at Jesus we're seeing God. One of Jesus disciples asked this question...

John 14 - ⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"

You understand this conversation, right? Philip says "Show us God." And Jesus answers "I'm right here."

One author uses the example of show-n-tell in Elementary school. Do you remember doing show-n-tell? You were allowed to bring something personal and dear to you, into class, to let your classmates see it, maybe even hold it, while you talked about it. It was **show** and tell...not just tell! Just talking about it would be ok, but wouldn't be nearly as clear as actually bringing it in. Talking about it would be giving your classmates an incomplete message. Jesus is like God's show-n-tell to humanity. Only in this case God chose to bring himself into the class.

God is like Jesus. God has always been like Jesus. There has never been a time when God was not like Jesus. (Zahnd)

And so, Jesus came to demonstrate most clearly what God is like. That's the first gift of the Gospel...that in Jesus, we see most clearly God's love. Let me just highlight three characteristics of God's love that we see in Jesus. The first is,

2. Unconditional Love

Paul reminded the church of this when he wrote these words to the church in Corinth...

1 Corinthians 1:26 - ²⁶ Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

In other words, intelligence, power, beauty, wealth, influence...none of those are why God loves you. God sent Jesus into this world, not because we deserved it or earned, but just because his love for us is unconditional.

When Jesus met a corrupt tax collector he loved him. When Jesus met a prostitute he loved her. When Jesus eyes fell upon an adulterer, a leper, a fisherman, a rich man...he loved each and every one of them because his love is unconditional.

I was thinking about this concept the other day. We were doing some clean up around the house and I came across an old pair of pajamas. In the spirit of show-n-tell, I brought them in with me, so that you can see them with your own eyes and behold the beauty of my 20 year old pajamas. They are tattered. Worn out. I won't pass them around, because they smell like 9 year old Shaun. There's nothing particularly lovable about them...and yet I love them.

I know you'll laugh at me for this. But you all, every single one of you in here can think of something like this in your own life. It's an old t-shirt, a stuffed animal, a card or a gift you received. It's old, outdated, worn out...(maybe it's your spouse or a co-worker)...but you love it. It's a kind of love that we would say is unconditional, no strings attached.

Jesus is God's proof, in a world of mixed signals, that God's love for each one of us is unconditional. This means that no matter how much of a mess you make of your life, God still loves you. There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more than he already does and nothing you can do to make God love you any less. That's the good news of the Gospel!

Jesus also demonstrates a love that is...

3. Boundless

This is similar to unconditional but a slightly different emphasis.

Paul describes it like this in [Romans 5](#) - **6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Now have you ever thought through carefully what Paul is saying here? It's a really powerful statement about boundless love. He is saying, "it seems reasonable, that out of love, someone would lay down their life for other people that they love, friends and family or laying down your life for people that are deserving, good people and so on. But what becomes boundless...unique...almost unreasonable is the kind of love that Jesus showed because he laid down his life **for his enemies, for the ungodly, for sinners, for people not deserving.**"

Roman soldiers drove nails into the hands and feet of Jesus and God loved them.

The religious leaders hurled insults at him and God loved them.
The disciples betrayed, denied and abandoned Jesus and he loved them.

And what about you and me. Each day we betray the life that He created us to live and yet he loves us still. That's what Paul is talking about here. "While we sinners, Christ died for us."

That third worship song that we sang this morning, called "**How Deep the Father's Love For Us**". The second verse of that song is a powerful statement of God's boundless love demonstrated in Jesus...

**Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished**

...Oh how deep the Father's love for us.

In Jesus, we receive the gift of God's boundless love! That's good news.

Third, when we look at Jesus, he demonstrates a love that is

4. Sacrificial

The Gospel writer John, describes it like this.

John 13 - It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

I was reading about this and found it really neat. The word “end” here is the Greek word **telos**...it means the end goal or ultimate purpose of something. Some translations say, “he loved them to the uttermost.”

When Christians think of Jesus’ telos or end goal or ultimate purpose we often, immediately think of the cross. We’ll say things like, “Jesus came to die.” Which is true, it was part of his purpose. But John reminds us in John 13 Jesus also came to show us how to live...that was part of his purpose too!

And so before he died, Jesus did this one final act to show his disciples what God is like. To the uttermost...to the very end...and here’s what it looked like in John 13:

⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Part of Jesus goal in coming was to demonstrate God’s sacrificial love. So, when we think about the gifts of the Gospel, one of the images we think about **is a cross** where Jesus died on our behalf. But one of the other things we think about is a basin and a towel. **(BIC LOGO)**. The gospel is a story about a God who gets down on his hands and knees to wash the feet of disciples, followers, betrayers, doubters, and deniers. That’s what God’s love is like to the uttermost.

Sometimes, I wonder if we wouldn’t be more effective in sharing the good news story about Jesus, if we made it our practice to assume the posture of a servant to betrayers, doubters and deniers in our world.

So, the first gift of the Gospel is that in Jesus, God demonstrates His love for humanity: unconditional, boundless, and sacrificial...I told you this is really good news!

This leads us right into the second gift of the Gospel and that is that in Jesus, God...

B. Saves us from sin.

So now we get to the part of the Gospel message that most of us are familiar with. And let's just talk about what this means for a minute. Because the word sin is not a popular word in our society and we church people often aren't very good at talking about it in helpful ways that people will listen to.

In fact, many unchurched people are not even sure that they agree there is such a thing called sin. It's partly because this word has often been used by Christians in order **to condemn** rather than to offer **hope**. Which is kind of ironic if you think about it. I have good news for you...“You're a horrible sinner, undeserving of love...” If that's the place we start or our emphasis, that doesn't sound like very good news.

Imagine furrowing your brow, pointing your finger, raising your voice and glaring while telling a young child that you love them.

Sometimes the tone and emphasis we use in our conversations, as we talk about Jesus saving us from sin, can make a big difference in how and whether people will listen.

In addition, a lot of times, I think we try to explain this by saying, “*I can prove you're a sinner.*” Here are some laws... often we point to the 10 Commandments...don't steal, don't swear, don't lie and you've broken these. So, don't you see that you're a sinner?

The problem with that approach is that many of the laws that we point to, like the 10 commandments, are in the OT. And many people today don't see the OT as authoritative for their lives anyway and so they aren't inclined to respond to that kind of approach.

That said, when we understand what the word sin really means, it can be a useful word to describe a real problem that all human beings share in common and that helps us to understand how Jesus solves that problem.

So first, when we're talking about how Jesus saves us from sin. It's good **start where the Bible does.**

In **Genesis 1**. Genesis 1 tells us first, that we created by an infinitely loving God, in His image for a life of peace, hope, joy and love lived in his presence. That actually does sound like good news!

Next let's talk about sin.

So, the Greek word for sin is the word **hamartia** and it literally means **to miss the mark**, to fail to hit the bulls-eye, to be off target. Sin simply refers to our failure to live the lives of peace, hope, joy and love we were created to live. We are off target, missing the mark with our lives.

And most people, no matter how they feel about the OT or the 10 Commandments, can resonate with the personal experience of feeling like they are missing the mark with their life. Most people can relate to the idea that:

“There’s a version of me I’m trying to be...but I don’t live up to that. I miss the mark.”

There's a bad habit in your life, and there have been times, you have decided that you're never going to do "that" ever again and then you've gone ahead and done it. Or, the opposite, you've said, "I need to start doing this, and you never did."

“That was the last time I’m losing my temper...I’m never visiting that website again...we’re not spending so much on Christmas gifts this year...I’m not wasting so

much time watching television or scrolling on social media...that's the last time I'm being dishonest."

Tomorrow I'm going to the gym and this time I'm sticking with it. I'm going to start getting enough sleep at night.

And when we say these things, we may have the best of intentions, but we miss the mark don't we? We know, deep down, this isn't how we were made to live, but it is the reality of who we have become. That's hamartia.

You are an internal contradiction...a broken person, not everything you know you should be! And if you're human I bet you can resonate with what I'm talking about.

And here's the problem with sin.

1. Sin SEPARATES.

It's separates us from **who we were created to be**. We just talked about that...I'm not who I want to be or know I should be.

Jesus said in [Mark 7](#) - **"²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."**

But we don't live in a vacuum. We are all of us born individually, but we are born into relationships. Born into a family. Families in communities. Communities into nations.

So, when we miss the mark on who we are supposed to be that also **separates us from the people around us**.

When I am sexually immoral, dishonest, greedy, deceitful, angry, lazy, gluttons...these things don't only affect me, they affect all of the people around me. Sin ruins our relationships!

In fact, that Greek word hamartia comes from the combination of two Greek words:

Ha meaning **not** and **meros**, meaning **“to be a part of”** or “together with.” Part of sin means “not being a part of, what we were meant to be together with”...like an arrow missing the mark and being separated from its target! My sin separates me from other people.

And then ultimately, **sin separates me from God**. God is relational at his very core. Trinity...father, son and Holy Spirit in perfect unity and relationship. We were created to live in relationship with him. So, our sin separates us from him, just like all of our other relationships.

Isaiah 59:2 - ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God...

Notice, it's not God ignoring us because of our sin. He isn't walking away from us. But our sin creates space between us, making that relationship increasingly difficult.

So you see the problem, right? We were designed to live a certain way. A life of love, joy, peace...but we humans miss the mark. We aren't what we were created to be and it separates us from our true selves, from each other and from the One who created us.

That's why the Gospel is such good news and why the second gift of the Gospel is that Jesus saves us from sin. Jesus undoes the separation that sin causes and he allows or rather invites all of us to reap the benefits.

2. Jesus Re-unites

Jesus reunites us with our true selves, with others and with God.

For example, Jesus was the perfect person we were all created to be, but have failed to be. **Hebrews 4:15 - ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.**

Jesus was the human who didn't miss the mark, he hit the bulls-eye.

And Jesus doesn't just show us what a perfect person lives like, but he offers to help us become what we were meant to be. This concept is called **solidarity**...the idea that one person's achievement or failure is everyone's achievement or failure.

In July of 1969, this man **(PIC), Neil Armstrong**, stepped out of a space shuttle and took the first human steps on the moon. Stating those famous words, "That's one step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Sometimes when we talk about the moon landing today...we'll say things like, "**We** (meaning humans) **have walked on the moon.**"

Now I have never actually walked on the moon. You couldn't pay me enough to sit on 900,000 lbs of rocket fuel and light it on fire and be launched into outer space. But, the concept of solidarity says, I get to share in Neil Armstrong's achievement. And so I say, "We have walked on the moon!"

The salvation piece of the Gospel pie means...we get to share in what Jesus did. This concept is all over the New Testament writings.

Romans 5:19 says - ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Ephesians 2:13 - ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5 - “²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^b for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That is solidarity. We get to share in Jesus perfection. That’s what we mean when we say Jesus saves us from sin. He is reuniting us with who we were created to be, with people around us and with our creator. So that, we might live and experience a life of peace, hope, love and joy. That’s salvation. And that sounds like really good news, doesn’t it?

Jesus is the heart of the Gospel and he demonstrates God’s love and saves us from sin.

Now for many Christians, this is the whole Gospel message...God’s love and salvation from Sin. But remember this is just a part of the full Gospel. Because God not only saves us from something, but He saves us to something and Someone!

And that’s what we’ll talk about next week, when we talk about **the purpose of the Gospel.**