



What is the Gospel?

*Gospel* is a word frequently thrown around in church circles, but what does it mean exactly? Typically, the Gospel is explained, "Jesus died on a cross for our sins," and while that's certainly part of the Gospel, it's not the entire story. Gospel comes from the Greek word *evangelion*, which means "joyful tidings, good news." Initially, this description of Jesus' brutal death on a cross makes no sense. What makes that *good* news?

The good news is this: Jesus freely gives sinners, who deserve God's wrath, salvation through his death on the Cross and his resurrection to new life.

Psalm 115:3 reads, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." God the Father, in His sovereignty, created all things for His glory. In the Book of Revelation, John records the words of those surrounding the throne of God. They say, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Nothing exists outside God's providence, and all things have been created to honor His Name.

Men and women also have been created to enjoy God forever as their loving Creator.

But our first parents, Adam and Eve, rejected this plan, and since then their sons and daughters have done the same by loving sin and hating God. We have rebelled against God's order by breaking His laws and pursuing our own selfish purposes rather than God's. The Apostle Paul saw this clearly when he wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

God is just, and He punishes sin. The first half of Romans 6:23 reads, "the wages of sin is death." Not only do we physically die, but, because of our sin, we are spiritually dead, too. We are completely unable to make ourselves right with God again through human effort or work. But that's where the rest of Romans 6:23 enters. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus freely saves us by absorbing God's wrath as our substitute. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, both fully God and fully man, to live among us. He was tempted like we are, but he never sinned, which makes Jesus the perfect sacrifice available to atone for our rebellion.

The Bible says that Jesus not only absorbed God's wrath against us, but he also became sin itself for us. As Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Like a victorious warrior, Jesus rose from death, having defeated sin and its fruit, especially death itself. Through his death, burial and resurrection, our sin debt has been paid, and our relationship with God restored for all eternity. The Apostle Peter wrote, "For Christ also 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" (1 Peter 3:18).

Paul explains it this way: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

So, God has created man for His glory. Man has rebelled against God and deserves eternal punishment. Jesus died as man's substitute and rose so that man would have new life, too.

That's not where it ends, though.

Man must respond to Jesus' work of salvation. John 3:16 makes clear that this salvation is for "whoever believes," but this belief is more than mere agreement. Jesus himself said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The belief that corresponds with salvation through Jesus involves two important aspects.

1. Repent: Aware of our sinful failure, we reject our sin. Repentance comprises hating our sin, for which Jesus absorbed God's wrath, and sincerely turning to Jesus, not in perfection, but humbly acknowledging our sin and rejoicing in the work of the Cross.

2. Believe: As humble sinners, we sincerely follow Jesus and trust that his completed work at the Cross is enough to save us and transform us into his likeness. The person who truly believes in Jesus as Savior will exhibit the fruit of Jesus' work in him. This person is declared innocent before God, because his guilt was transferred to Jesus at the Cross. This person receives complete and lasting forgiveness for his sins, because God gives mercy through Jesus' work at the Cross. This person receives the Holy Spirit who guides and empowers him for producing the fruit of a new life bought by Jesus. This person has the promise of complete restoration just as Jesus himself rose to a new life. Finally, this person will live eternally with God as a member of the family of believers, the Church.

Romans 10:9-10 reads, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Jesus freely gives salvation to all who believe.

And so, Jesus' humiliating death and glorious resurrection become good news, not because they show the goodness of mankind or the worth of humanity, but because they display the glory of a God who lovingly redeems a people for His Name's sake. In justice, God punishes sin. In mercy, He poured out His wrath on Jesus rather than us. This shouldn't stir up pride but humility as we turn from sin and follow Jesus, our Savior.