

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL

SUNDAY 20th APRIL 2025 | SIM FORDER

The good news of the gospel: Easter Sunday morning (2025)

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 20th April 2025 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Acts 17:30-31

The importance of context

The word *gospel* itself means *good news*. So what do we mean when we talk about the *good news of the gospel*? Well, of course, we're talking about the Christian gospel, that is; the good news of what God has done for us. And *that* good news is so good that the word *good* feels kind of like an understatement!

Indeed, as Christians, we know that this is *amazing* news. That's why we sing of God's *amazing grace*, and His *steadfast love*, of our *boundless peace*, *blessed assurance*, and of how *marvellous* His love for us is. And we *do* so, because we have and know Jesus as our Saviour. How precious that is! How right it is that we *do* sing of such things.

But this morning I want us to start by taking a step back for a moment, and consider *how* we talk about the *good news of the gospel* with unbelievers, for doing so will help us too. You see, as good as it is to sing those things, and to *speak* of those things, those things in isolation can seem confusing to someone who doesn't know Jesus as their Saviour. And if we're not careful, we can forget the enormity of what God has done for us.

Consider this; If you were in good health, but randomly received a letter from the NHS that said *"we have great news, you can start chemotherapy next week!"*, you would at least be perplexed, or thinking *they must have got the wrong person*. That is, you would see no link between your current health, and what the letter was about. And so it is when we *only* say "Jesus died for you!" to an unbeliever, without any context. It doesn't make sense, and if anything they are apprehensive because we're then going on to tell them they need something that they don't believe they do, and have probably heard some bad things about. Just as no-one would sign up for chemo without knowing why, nor will anyone come to Christ as their Saviour without knowing why they need to.

But if you walked into a routine doctor appointment, and they said, *"I have some serious news to tell you. We got your blood test results back, and I'm sorry to say that you have a disease that is going to kill you if left untreated"*. In that scenario, how long would it take you after they said *"but, you can start chemotherapy next week and there's a high chance you'll get through this"* for you to breath a sigh of relief and start asking all the details about how you get that treatment? It would be a matter of urgency for you, right?

You see, the bad news makes the good news make sense. That context, is all important.

Consider another example; you get a letter through your door that says you have a £2,500 fine for dangerous driving, but... there's nothing to pay because someone you don't know has paid the fine for you. Again, you would be somewhat confused, especially if you thought that your driving was good. Rather than relief that your fine had been paid, you'd probably be more focussed on the accusation that you had been driving dangerously, when you didn't think you had done so.

But if that letter said *"On Tuesday 18th March you drove dangerously through Canterbury City Centre, using the bus lane, driving through a red light, ignoring a 20mph speed limit, and knocking over a pedestrian, all the while talking on your mobile phone, as shown in the CCTV photos shown below"* — then you would realise the gravity of the situation, as you realised that this wasn't a mere *accusation*, but that there was tangible evidence of your dangerous driving (even if you had been unaware of the ways in which you had done so until now). You would take a deep breath, right?

And then, picture how you would feel, as you *read* on, to see a line that said *"You were due to appear in court on Monday 12th May at 9:00am, where a fine of up to £2,500 could have been issued to you, but someone you don't know has paid the fine for you, and there will be no further action against you"*.

What would your response be? Relief? You bet! But wouldn't you also want to know who paid that fine for you? Wouldn't you feel gratitude to them?! Wouldn't you also want to find the pedestrian you'd knocked over to see how they are, to show kindness to *them* for how you'd treated them?

Again, the bad news of the weight of the law against you, that realisation of what you had done contrary to the law, and that you would be found guilty as charged, makes the good news at the end of the letter make sense, right?!

So it is with the gospel. When all someone hears is "God loves you" or "Jesus died for you", then at best they'll think "well, that's nice" but it won't help them. And it won't make sense to them, for they are lacking the context of the bad news, that makes the good news seem like good news indeed!

The bad news

So, what *is* the bad news, then? Well, it starts back at the very beginning — that God made mankind with the freedom to choose to do good, or evil. That is, He gave us the choice whether to do right, or wrong. For, He didn't want robots that would merely carry out His instructions, but rather He chose to make living souls with the capacity to love (which was only possible if there was free choice).

However, the problem of free choice was that in choosing to sin, Adam and Eve, like us, disobeyed a just, holy, and perfect God, who because He was and is just, holy, and perfect, cannot tolerate sin. In fact, because He is just, He must see that justice is done. Because He is Holy, He cannot take bribes to let anyone off. And because He is perfect, He makes no mistakes, and so we will not escape through some sort of technicality or loophole. In other words, we're in trouble.

But aren't we basically good people? Well, we like to think so, don't we! But God, through Moses, gave His holy law — and in Exodus chapter 20 onwards we read the 10 commandments that we're no doubt familiar with, and more beside. But rather than help us, the law actually showed us how wrongly we have lived — that just as a mirror doesn't wash you, but shows you how dirty you are, so the law doesn't help us, but rather shows us how helpless we are before a just, holy and perfect God.

It reveals to us how indeed we have put made up gods before the one true God, how we have worshipped things other than Him, how we've taken Christ's name in vain, and how we have not given priority to the things of God. And it reveals to us the extent to which we've disobeyed God in our actions toward other people; disobeying our parents, hating others in our heart, lusting after people as they walk by or we spend time online — or even being unfaithful in marriage, and then stealing from others, lying to them, and coveting what others have. The law shines light on the dire situation we are in.

That's why the Bible says in Romans chapter 3 that "... by the law is the knowledge of sin.", and then in Romans chapter 7 the apostle Paul went on to write "... I would not have known sin except through the law...". In other words, it's like the dangerous driving example I gave you earlier, that the presence of CCTV photos on that letter showing how you had driven badly, actually revealed the seriousness of the situation that you were in.

And lest any of us think that somehow we're the exception to the rule, that somehow we have not broken any of God's law, David writes in Psalm 14:

Psalm 14:2-3

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.

So then, we are *all* in trouble, for the best of us is condemned with the worst of us, for God, being just, must see that justice is carried out toward *all* who have broken His holy standards, not some. And as such we are shut up under the weight of His law, as if (as Charles Spurgeon described it) there are 10 great cannons surrounding us ready to fire against us, for the sin we have committed. Indeed, Galatians 3:22 tells us that the Scripture has confined all under sin. That there is no room to move.

And so, we see then, that the law shows us the reality of our situation. It exposes our sin. It gives us the bad news, that we might understand why the good news is actually good. That's what it is there for, that it might actually *lead* us to Christ — this is why Paul wrote to the Galatians saying:

Galatians 3:21-24

Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Kevin DeYoung summarised all this well, saying:

The message of the cross and the good news of the gospel will never make sense until we believe that our deepest problem is our sin, until we recognize that the deepest problem with this world is that it is in rebellion against its Maker.

Kevin DeYoung

So then, the bad news is very bad. For we are guilty before a just, holy, and perfect God. And there will come a day in which He *will* judge the world in righteousness. Indeed, it would be a surprise to many in this world that Jesus is in fact the one who will judge! We read in Acts 17:

Acts 17:30-31

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

And that brings us to the good news.

The good news

You see, man's rebellion against Him, that is *our* sin, was not a surprise to God. And so before He even made the world and created mankind, God planned to send Jesus to pay for the sin He knew we would commit. And He announced this right after Adam & Eve first sinned, speaking of the Seed that would follow, with that Seed being Jesus Christ. He then foretold the good news of the gospel in the genealogy we find in Genesis chapter 5, with the meaning of those names listed there meaning **Man (is) appointed mortal sorrow; (but) the Blessed God shall come down, teaching (that) His death shall bring (the) despairing rest.**

And God continued to point to what He would do, first by calling Abraham, then by promising a son to him, and then through Abraham's faithfulness He pointed to the sacrifice Jesus would make as He too walked up a hill carrying the wood required for His own sacrifice, for our sin. Then, through the people that God called and preserved, He thwarted the attempts of Satan to destroy this Seed, this line through to the one that would save us, and until ultimately He sent Jesus to earth, that as we read in John 3:

John 3:14-17

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

That is, rather than us try and earn our forgiveness, which we could never do since God is just and must see that all sin is paid for, Jesus instead paid for our sin, in our place, right there on the cross. Dying the death we should have died. That as we read in Hebrews 9:28, *Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.* That as we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"...He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

What wonderful news! What marvellous news! How *incredible* that God would do this for us, when we were not deserving of it at all. That God would, as Isaiah foretold, would lay on Jesus the iniquity (the sin) of us all. Indeed, as David wrote in Psalm 32, *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered."* How great is our God to do this for us! How blessed we are!

But the good news of the gospel isn't complete there, for a dead Saviour would be no Saviour at all. Indeed, Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying that *"if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"* for it is not through Jesus' *death*, but through His *resurrection* that we have been given new life. We read in 1 Peter chapter 1:

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

That is, we have not merely been forgiven, but we have been made God's children, adopted by Him, and made joint heirs with Christ Himself. The good news of the gospel is nothing short of outstanding kindness and love. Oh, how great is our God!!

The need for repentance & faith

But in considering this marvellous news, we should note that this gift of salvation is not automatic. That is, Jesus' death in our place doesn't automatically mean we are forgiven, but rather we must come to God in repentance and faith, as we *read* earlier, and we'll read *again* here from Acts 17, which says:

Acts 17:30-31

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Again, that is, unless you come to God, turning from your sin and putting your faith in Jesus to save you, you will *not* be saved, and instead you will have to one day stand in front of God where He will judge you in righteousness, for which there will be only one outcome — that you will be guilty as charged, and found deserving of eternal punishment in hell.

So please, please note, that no amount of good works you do, will ever excuse your past sin. You cannot pay for it yourself that you might go free, and so you need someone to pay it for you. And the only One who can is Jesus. He has offered His free gift of salvation to you, but it is up to you whether to accept it. That just as you could turn down a gift from anyone, so you too can turn down this incredible free gift that solves your biggest problem. So don't make that terrible mistake. Indeed, don't make the mistake of doing nothing, for to do nothing, is still to make a decision, which in this case is to refuse God's goodness found in the free gift of salvation that He offers to you today.

What now?

Now, I know many of you, indeed most of you here this morning, have done just that, and come to Jesus in repentance and faith, trusting in Him *alone* to save you from your sin. And how wonderful *that* is too.

But what now? How do we respond to such a wonderful gift of salvation? Well, I suggest there are *at least* four things we should each do.

First, we should be thankful and rejoice!

I mean, how could we be given something so precious, so wonderful, at such cost to Jesus, and at no cost to us, and not be grateful or happy for it?! I love the first verse of 1 John chapter three, for John practically bursts with wonder at what God has done — he writes:

1 John 3:1a

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!..

Think of it — you and I were destined for hell, and rightly so, for we had disobeyed the Creator of the universe, we had sinned against Him, we had wronged those around us. And at no cost to us, He sent His only Son to die in our place, that we might go free, as He hung on the cross in our place. What wonderful grace!

You would expect anyone who has received such wonderful grace to rejoice about it, to sing songs about it, to write or to read books about it, to talk to others about it, right? I mean, those of you who are married, don't you enjoy looking back on your wedding photos? It is no hardship to do so, for you have been loved, and your life has changed. How much more ought we ought to have a love for the things of God, who has saved us and given Himself for us!? How much more we should want to learn of more about Him! How much more should we want to spend time in His presence!?

We read this exhortation in the letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:17-21

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

So then, let us not forget our first love, as Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus for doing. Let us be thankful and rejoice in the good news of the gospel. When we sing God's praises on a Sunday morning, let us not do it tentatively or half-heartedly, but let us raise our voices to the full, not mumbling or muttering the words, but proclaiming them boldly, and with thankfulness in our hearts. Not that we worship for what others think of us, but may no-one ever look at us praising God and wonder if we actually mean it.

If Paul and Silas were able to sing so loudly in *prison* that the other prisoners could hear them, how we surely ought to raise *our* voices when gathered as God's church! But of course, let our *hearts* above all be that which sings loudly, making melody in our hearts to God — which doesn't require the right notes, but the right attitude. One that should be full of thanks and praise.

Now, **second, we should share the gospel!**

Think back to the examples I started with today. Have you ever known anyone who has survived cancer, who wouldn't encourage others to go and get themselves checked out if they had any symptoms? *You and I* have been saved from certain death, from an eternity in *hell*, so how can we not care if others are saved too? Charles Spurgeon was very direct, saying:

Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you're not saved yourself, be sure of that!

Charles Spurgeon

That is a serious warning that we should all take note of. If it doesn't bother us that there are thousands of people in this town heading towards hell, something is wrong. If it doesn't bother us that friends and family members are likewise on course for hell, something is wrong. If we don't care about reaching others with the gospel ourselves, or supporting those that do, something is wrong. If we are not praying that unbelievers we know would be saved, something is wrong.

But also, let us note, that we are to share the gospel faithfully, which means sharing it fully. When we *only* tell people that God is good, that He loves them, and that Jesus died for them, we are only telling them the *good* news, without the *bad*. And lacking that context, the good news doesn't seem so good. Worse still, if we only tell others that they should be a Christian because it's the best thing, that they'll have peace and joy, that they'll have Christian friends, and a church family around them, then we'll actually be risking them becoming a *false* convert, who will walk away at the first sign of the promised persecution, or at the first sign of difficulty in their life.

While it's a fine thing to share our testimony of how good God has been to us in our life here on Earth, that pales into insignificance to how good He has been in *saving* us — and *that* is what we *really* need to share. That we would tell of *amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a... wretch like me*. Not amazing grace that blessed us with a spouse, a house, or a nice job.

May we have the same heart as Paul, who wrote in Romans 9, saying "*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.*" — what was this sorrow about? It was about the spiritual state of his fellow countrymen. And we find in chapter 10 that he writes "*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.*" May that be our heart's desire for those around us. It's nice if our kids get good jobs, do well in their exams or whatever. But that's not the best thing we can pray for them. It's not the best thing we can pray for anyone. So let us be moved to pray for others. And let us be willing to share the gospel with others.

Let these words from Romans chapter 1 be true of us:

Romans 1:16-17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Next, both rejoicing in the gospel, and sharing the gospel with others, let us **live in response to the gospel** too, for God didn't save us to leave us as we are.

We read in 1 Peter chapter 2:

1 Peter 2:9-12

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

That is, the way we live should be so in line with how the Bible says we should live, that even unbelievers around us will have nothing bad to say of us, and even more importantly, nothing bad to say of God. For what a tragic shame it is when we see ministers, churches, and those who serve in them, in the public spotlight for how poorly they have conducted themselves — despicably so in some cases. These things ought not be the case! We have been called to be holy, as He is holy. So, let us do that, knowing that He will help us through His Holy Spirit as we come before His throne of grace in our moment of need.

In that sense, may we look to the example of Joseph, who, when presented with the opportunity to sin by sleeping with Potiphar's wife, refused to sin against God. We read in Genesis 39:8-9...

Genesis 39:8-9

But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

May we always remember that we are seeking to honour Him above all things. And may we remember how, for David writes in Psalm 119:

Psalm 119:9-16

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared All the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

Do you want to know how a young man can end up embroiled in sin? By ignoring God's word. By seeking God half-heartedly, or not at all. By wandering from God's commandments. By failing to put God's Word in his heart. By not allowing God to teach him His statutes, His laws, His ways. By not making God and His Word a topic of his conversation, but not rejoicing in what God has done more than what he has done himself. By giving no thought to living for God, or what God has said, and in doing so forgetting that which he has already heard.

Perhaps we should each read through those verses, and be honest with ourselves as to whether it really sounds like us saying those things. And if not, may that be a wake up call to us, for Jesus endured so much on the cross for you and I — that it would be beyond rude for us to treat that sacrifice with contempt. Charles Spurgeon put it like this:

He has done all this for you, has bled away His precious life, has died in agonies most exquisite upon the cross. What have you done for Him?

Charles Spurgeon

To treat Jesus' sacrifice as if it were some insignificant or trivial thing, is not a right response. Let us take note of what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 12:

Romans 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

You cannot be *conformed* to this world, *and* be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind at the same time. It's either or. It's the flesh, or the spirit. And the one you feed will be the one who lives, and the one you starve will be the one who gives. So, let us sow to the spirit that we may reap of the spirit, not sow to the flesh, for we read in Galatians that will only bring corruption.

Now **fourth, we should long for the rapture!** That is, we should be longing for the day where Jesus calls His Bride, the church, to meet Him in the air, when He will take us to be with Him in Heaven forever more. And while this world at times may make us want to get out of here sooner rather than later, it is not an escape that we're looking for, but for Jesus Himself.

We see Paul's attitude as an example in this in his letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:12-14

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize is not the rapture itself, but being in God's presence. We read in 1st Peter of this living hope:

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

What we have ahead of us as we spend eternity with our Saviour is better than anything this world can offer, and if we fix our eyes on that, it will have a purifying effect on us now. We read in 1 John chapter 3:

1 John 3:2-3

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Indeed, if we really have repented and put our faith in Jesus as our Saviour, if we have really received His amazing grace, then we will continually seeking to please Him more and more in all that we do. And we won't be on our own in this, for Jesus Himself will help us, for that is His desire for us too. We read in the second chapter of Paul's letter to Titus:

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

God loves us too much to leave us as we are. So, let us long for the time where we with the One who loves us the most. And if there were not already enough motive to do this, let us remember what we read in 2 Timothy 4, for that tells us there is even reward in doing so. We read there:

2 Timothy 4:8


Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Conclusion


So then, the good news of the gospel is good news indeed. Not only for you and me, but for all men and women everywhere. It is the *best* news anyone could ever receive, so let us really consider that deeply in the week ahead. Let it not be a trivial thing to us, for there is nothing better that will happen today, or any day, than you (or anyone) being saved by God's grace. And as you think on these things, ask yourself these questions about your response to the good news of the gospel:

- Will you rejoice?
 - Will you share the gospel?
 - Will you live for Him?
 - Are you longing for the rapture?
 - Are you saved at all?
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