

Welcome to everyone listening outside.

A couple of years ago Allison and I both had problems with the same dentist. Allison got the worst of it. It started with a simple filling and she ended up losing a tooth. So, we went in for the dreaded consultation / confrontation.

After explaining our concerns, this dentist dropped a language bomb on us. She started saying things like, “endodontic treatment in the UL5 considering the temporomandibular effects on the occlusal and mesial parts of the tooth.” And we’re like, “Huh.”

Every profession or group has its own lingo, an inside language. Doctors are just one example. Lawyers are the worst. Teenagers have a jargon unique to them. This is why you can’t understand half of what your kid or grandchild says.

Church people have their own lingo, too. We do. It’s called Christianese. We say stuff that no one can understand unless you’ve been around the church for a while. Some of the stuff we say just sounds weird, if you think about it, or it doesn’t make sense without some explanation.

- The Lord laid it on my heart (backing away slowly... “Okay.”)
- I was having a quiet time (Are you okay? Is it better now?)
- Let’s do life together. (I don’t know you that well)
- Everything happens for a reason (Something we say when someone’s puppy or worse has died. Not the most caring or understanding.)
- We are the body of Christ. (Are you guys some sort of strange cult?)
- Let partake of the body and blood of Jesus. (This just sounds plain creepy.)

Or how about the songs we sing, how confusing they might be to someone new to the faith.

- When heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss (Oh, you mean like sexual assault?)
- I could sing of your love forever (Really? Like wouldn’t you want to eat or take a nap at some point?)

I know a lot of our terminology has very deep and important meanings. And the songs we sing—one person’s stupid song is another person’s favorite. I try very hard in the pulpit to be understandable whether you’ve been a Christian for 40 years or you’re not even sure yet Jesus ever really lived, and when I use Christian lingo, to hopefully explain what it means.

This morning, we want to look at one of those Christian lingo words. The word is *gospel*. Can you use that in a sentence? Have you heard the gospel? We proclaim the gospel? We listen to gospel music. What’s gospel mean? Why’s it a big deal?

Our Core verse this week is one that on its own doesn’t sound like it’s one of the most important verses in the Bible. It’s Mark 1:1 which says, “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*”

The reason this is one of the Core 52 verses, is because it's one of the first mentions of the Gospel in the New Testament. Not in terms of the order of the books in your Bible, but in the chronological order the books were written in.

I. What is the Gospel?

So what does gospel mean?

A. Gospel means Good News

The short answer is Gospel means good news, as in, "Guess what? I've got some good news." Whenever you hear the word "Gospel" just plug in the words "good news." Originally, 'gospel' wasn't a churchy or religious word at all. In the 1st Century, good news of any sort was gospel. Like I've got good news and I've got bad news.

Two friends, both avid baseball fans made a pact that whoever died first would come back and let the other know what heaven was like. The first one died and came back and told his friend, "I've got some good news and bad news. The gospel (the good news) is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is you're scheduled to pitch Friday."

The word 'gospel' itself actually comes from the old English word *gōdspel* meaning good spell, or good tale or good story. The word that's actually used in the Greek New Testament is *evangelion* which means *good news*. If that word looks familiar, that's because it's where we get our word evangelism. Those who shared good news were called *evangelos*— thus our word evangelist. Some variation of these words is used more than 125 times in the Bible.

Here's one more curious tidbit. Both of these words are based on the Greek word for angel, which simply means messenger. An angel wasn't necessarily a spiritual being bringing a message from God, although we see a lot of that in the Bible

In the ancient biblical world, battlefield commanders would send angels, or messengers from the front lines after winning a key battle to announce the good news, the evangel, the gospel, back home.

You've probably heard the story of Marathon, the origin of our modern sporting event. In 490 BC, The Greeks were victorious over the Persians in the Battle of Marathon. The gospel evangelist Pheidippides, ran all the way from Marathon to Athens to deliver the good news. He ran approximately 26 miles. The story goes that upon delivering the good news, he died.

(Advance Slide)

We see the exact same thing in biblical battle accounts. In 1 Samuel 31:9, when the Philistines defeated King Saul's army, it says they, "*sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news, the gospel, to the house of their idols and to their people.*"

Kings and emperors also sent out angels, messengers to cities and towns all over the empire.

They would make important announcements and to evangelize good news from the capital.

Of course, these messengers were paid to make the emperor look good, so whatever announcements they made were to be “good news,” or gospel. Of course, politics being such as it is, these announcements were filled with spin and embellishment. Mark Moore provides this example from Augustus Caesar:

Because providence has ordered our life in a divine way . . . and since the Emperor through his epiphany has exceeded the hopes of former (gospel) good news, surpassing not only the benefactors who came before him, but also leaving no hope that anyone in the future will surpass him, and since the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of his (gospel) good news [may it therefore be decreed that]

It’s nothing but pure, pompous political propaganda. Augustus Caesar claims to be the son of a god and that his good news is better than all good news that came before and is better than all good news that will ever follow. You have a culture where people are used to messengers who proclaimed good news of the kingdom.

So the early Christians and the inspired writers of the New Testament come along and adopt this gospel language, this evangelism lingo, to say we are messengers of real good news from a kingdom that is beyond this world, good news of a king that is eternal, good news from a king who is the true Son of God.

In using this term, gospel or evangel, not only were they exalting Jesus, but it was also a thinly veiled insult against the emperor. Caesar claims to give you good news, but he really doesn’t. Caesar claims to be the divine son of a god, but He really isn’t. But Jesus. He. Really. Is.

Here, though, I should mention an important difference between how the Bible uses the word gospel, and how the ancient Greek and Roman world did. In that ancient culture, gospel was always in the plural, meaning one good tiding among others. In the New Testament, however, gospel always appears in the singular. It is THE good news of God in Jesus. It is to emphasize the point that Jesus is the good news and there is no other. So, gospel is good news.

B. Gospel is the first four books of the New Testament

There is a second way we use the word gospel that is a little more specific. We use gospel to refer to the first four books of the New Testament– the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of Mark, of Luke, and John. They are the four gospels. And they’re the only four books of the Bible we call gospels.

We see the reason right here in Mark 1:1. Mark was very likely the first of the four gospels written. In this verse, he calls his biography of Jesus a gospel. “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” Mark goes on to use the word gospel seven times in 16 chapters. This idea of good news was a big deal to Mark.

Whether or not Mark meant gospel as a title, it became so— *the Gospel According to Mark*. So, when the other life stories of Jesus were written, they were called gospels too. In this sense, gospel is a physical thing, it's a book with written words.

C. Gospel is the Story of Jesus

From here, we sometimes stretch the word gospel, then to refer to the story of Jesus, even if we don't mean one of the first four books of the New Testament. Gospel is the story of Jesus. In this sense the gospel is a message. It's a concept. It's an idea. It's a story, a true story, but a story nonetheless.

You'll hear Christians talking about the gospel story. This is the sense they're using the word gospel. This could be the whole story of Jesus from his birth, to his earthly ministry with his teachings and miracles. It goes through his arrest, death and resurrection and all the way to His second coming. All of that could be considered gospel, or any part of it could be called gospel. In this way, gospel is the story of Jesus.

D. Gospel is the plan of salvation.

There's one final way we use the word gospel I want to tell you about. Many times Christian preachers and teachers will use the word gospel with a little more precision, to refer to the plan of salvation. The gospel, in this sense, are those parts of the Jesus story and our response that brings about salvation.

The gospel on this level is that God loves you so much He sent His Son to die for every wrong thing you, you've ever done and every wrong thing you will ever do, and if you trust in Jesus and follow Him, He will forgive you for every messed up thing, what the Bible calls sin, and make you a part of His family for all eternity. The apostle Paul uses gospel this way in Romans 1:16, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*"

II. The Beginning of the Gospel

The very first word in the original version of Mark's gospel is the word *beginning*. Ancient writers would often communicate their intentions by parking the most important words right up front. So, Mark starts with "Beginning of the gospel."

Now check this out. The very first word in the Hebrew Bible in the book of Genesis? *Beginning*. Coincidence? I think not. Mark envisioned his gospel as a counterpoint to the book of Genesis. Genesis is the record of the beginning of God's creation— the creation of the world, the creation of his plan of salvation, the creation of His people. The gospel of mark is the beginning of God's work to restore and redeem his creation.

Mark is saying that God is at work right now just as He was at the beginning. What God is doing through Jesus is just as big a deal as what He did in creation, what He did with Abraham, Isaac,

Jacob, and Joseph. I love what James Edwards writes in his book on Mark, “For Mark the introduction of Jesus is no less momentous than the creation of the world, for in Jesus a new creation is at hand.”ⁱ

Mark’s beginning is significant in another way as well. He doesn’t say his account is the gospel, or that he tells the whole gospel. His book is just the beginning of the gospel.

The Jesus story doesn’t end with the resurrection. The good news is not over with the last chapters of Matthew and Mark and Luke and John. The gospel doesn’t end when Jesus ascends back into heaven. It’s only beginning. It’s just started.

The gospel story continued in the book of Acts with a church that began with only 120 believers, and from there it blossomed into an empire-wide phenomenon. Sometimes people were added to the kingdom thousands at a time. The good news of Jesus spread and churches were planted on three different continents. If you read the book of Acts and read the last chapter, it doesn’t really have an ending. Talk about a story that leaves you hanging. Mark is just the beginning of the gospel. In Acts, it continues, and the story goes on.

The gospel continues throughout 2,000 years of church history. Kings tried to destroy the gospel. Armies marched against it. Decrees were issued to outlaw it. Believers were fed to lions and burned at the stake. Bibles were banned and burned. Satan did all he could to erase the good news from the face of the planet. But still the gospel continues.

The story is still being written. One day a chapter will be written about how a pandemic shut down churches across the world, but still the good news continues. A chapter about how politics divided believers one from another, but somehow the gospel continued.

The gospel continues in your life. Each one of you is a part of the gospel story. What will your part of story say? How will it go? What part of that story might be written today? This week? This year? Could this be that pivotal point where the whole story changes? Where one decision becomes a watershed event, where one small change, changes everything.

You see, this part of the gospel story isn’t written by Mark. It’s inspired by God, It flows through the love of Jesus working in your life. And your hand holds the figurative pen from which the words of this good news flow. So, how will your part of the story be written?

Alternative Introduction

Good news and bad news.

Two friends who were avid baseball fans. They made a pact that whoever died first would come back and let the other know what heaven was like. The first one died and came back and told his friend, “The good news is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is you’re scheduled to pitch Friday.”

A man lay in the hospital with two broken legs following an accident. The doctor comes in and says, “I’ve got good news and bad news. Which would you like to hear first?” “Give me the bad news, Doc.” “The bad news is we’re going to have to amputate both your legs.” “What’s the good news?” “The guy in the bed next to you will give you \$100 for your shoes.

The doctor’s office calls the patient and says, “I’ve got good news and bad news.” “Give me the good news.” “Okay, you have 24 hours to live.” “How’s that good news, what’s the bad news?” “We’ve been trying to call you since yesterday.”

How about one more...A woman went to the DMV to renew her license. She made sure she looked her best, because for the last five years she was stuck with an awful drivers license photo. However, when she got there, it was packed. The line inched along. The AC wasn’t working very well. Finally, after two hours she got her license. She inspected the photo for a moment, before saying, “I was waiting in line so long, I ended up looking pretty grouchy in this photo. The clerk took a look, “That’s okay, because that’s how you’re going to look when the cops pull you over anyway.”

We could use some good news, couldn’t we? Especially in 2020, it seems like there’s more bad news every time we turn around. Well, we are here this morning to talk about good news.

ⁱ Edwards, James R. The Gospel according to Mark. Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002. Print. The Pillar New Testament Commentary.