

Christian Ambassador Training

The Gospel Is – Week 6

Group Discussion-- Commanding the Impossible?

“Would/Did Jesus command people to do what they could not possibly do?”

Put examples on the board – save for reference at the end of the class. With each one ask: “... and then what happened?”

^{ESV} **Matthew 14:29** He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

^{ESV} **Matthew 17:27** However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

^{ESV} **John 5:8** Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."

^{ESV} **Luke 9:13** But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish--unless we are to go and buy food for all these people."

^{ESV} **Mark 5:41** Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

^{ESV} **John 11:43** When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

^{ESV} **Matthew 5:48** You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I found it more difficult thinking of cases where he gave a command that was possible. We'll talk more about this later, but what I want you to take away from this:

- Jesus often commanded the impossible
- And then what? ... He provided the power to make it happen.

Review

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:17-21** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us **the message of reconciliation**. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We are ambassadors *for Christ*. In the first week we talked about essentials for an ambassador: and those were...? Knowledge, Wisdom, and Character

As we study the needed knowledge of the ambassador for Christ, we broke it out into knowledge about our Sovereign, our Sovereign's message, and those to whom we are called to be ambassadors (the culture).

Now let's scan through the preaching of Jesus, his disciples, and the apostolic message in Acts.

I. His Message

^{ESV} **Mark 1:14-15** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**"

- A. "Repent and believe" is the consistent call of Jesus and his followers.
The biblical model of evangelism: law to the proud, grace to the humble.
- B. Believe what? ...

We began with what the gospel is *not*.

II. The Gospel is Not¹

- A. The Gospel is not that salvation is easy. (Law Lite/Easy Believism)
 - Actually, it is *impossible*. (Mark 10:23-27; John 6:44)

Homework Question: Does Jesus command the impossible of people?
- B. The Gospel is not that Jesus can make your life better or you a better you.
 - Count the cost (Matt 10:38-39; 2 Tim 3:12; Jam.1:2; 2 Cor 5:17)
- C. The Gospel is not that we are **OK**. (Eph 2:1-5; Col 2:13-14; John 3:3; 1 Cor 15)
- D. The Gospel is not simply that God is **love** (1 John 4:8; Exo 34:6-7).

The Riddle of the Old Testament -- How can both be true?

^{ESV} **Exodus 34:6-7** The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

¹ Much of this list from the wonderful brothers at 9Marks ministries-- under Mark 3--The Gospel.

- E. The Gospel is not simply that Jesus wants to be our **friend** or **example**.

III. The Gospel Is²

- A. What is the Gospel? --*An important in-house example of scaling the language barrier*

Two views because people are essentially answering two different questions. Both are legitimate (and related) questions and good Scriptural answers.

1. "What is the message a person must believe in order to be saved?" *Zoom Lens*
2. "What is the whole good news of Christianity?" *Wide-angle Lens*

- B. "Wide-angle" gospel a.k.a "The gospel of the Kingdom"

Sometimes Scripture uses the term gospel to refer to "the entire package of blessings that Christ secures for his people." [p. 95]

1. ^{ESV} **Matthew 4:23** And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

John the Baptist – pre-church, but sounds familiar

^{ESV} **Matthew 3:1** In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus' first words preached --Quotes Isa. 9:1 in clear reference to Kingdom promises fulfilled

^{ESV} **Matthew 4:15-17** "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- ¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

^{ESV} **Mark 1:14-15** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

- Note how this good news (gospel) also calls for a response: *Repent and believe!*

2. ^{ESV} **Luke 4:18-19a** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

A clear and authoritative statement by Jesus of Kingdom promises being fulfilled in Him.

- Note how Jesus quotes Isa 61 verse 1 and part of verse 2. That part that he is fulfilling at that time. Jesus deliberately does not finish verse 2 "... and the day of vengeance of our God" because it is not being fulfilled... not yet. It is the year of favor, the time of good news! [p. 98]

² Much of this material is from chapter 4 of Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert's book *What is the Mission of the Church?* Crossway Books, 2011. All [page references] are to this book.

C. “Zoom-angle” gospel a.k.a. “The gospel of the Cross”

There are other passages that seem to focus on “the gospel” much more narrowly on the forgiveness of sins through the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross.” [p. 100]

1. ^{ESV} **Acts 10:36,43** As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), ... ⁴³ To him all the prophets bear witness that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**

➤ *Peace with God--for those who are by nature His enemies*

^{ESV} **Romans 5:10** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

2. ^{ESV} **Romans 1:16-17** For 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. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

- The thesis statement of the book of Romans
- The gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes.
- In the gospel the righteousness of/from God is revealed (imputed--Rom 4:3-6)

3. ^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 15:1-5** Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and **by which you are being saved**, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as **of first importance** what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins** in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day** in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

➤ Key verse with respect to the definition and content of the Gospel.

4. ^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:17-18** For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach **the gospel**, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest **the cross** of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved **it is the power of God.**

Breakout 1 -- The Message of Reconciliation

Hopefully you are becoming very familiar with one of our primary texts. **2 Corinthians 5:17-21** speaks of a message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us. I equated that message to the Gospel.

1. Would you say it is more closely aligned with the gospel of the cross (zoom) or gospel of the Kingdom (wide-angle)? Why?

2. So some of these other “reconciliation” (with respect to man’s broken relationship with God) help?

^{ESV} **Romans 5:10-11** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

^{ESV} **Colossians 1:20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

D. “Pulling It All Together” [p. 106]

DeYoung and Gilbert give some helpful points when we seek to integrate our understanding of the meaning of the Gospel.

1. There is only one Gospel, not two. The New Testament writers seem to have no trouble zooming out and zooming in on the one true gospel.
2. The gospel of the Kingdom necessarily includes the gospel of the cross. You cannot proclaim the “full gospel” if you leave out the message of the cross...

Recall--the gospel of the Kingdom is preached with a commanded response. (Matt 4:7; Mar 1:15)

That is the crucial thing to keep in mind; indeed it is the difference between preaching the gospel and preaching something that is not the gospel at all. To proclaim the inauguration of the kingdom and all the other blessings of God without telling people how they may become partakers of those blessings is to preach a nongospel. Indeed it is to preach an *antigospel--bad news--*because you’re simply explaining wonderful things that your sinful hearers will never have the opportunity to be a part of. [p.108]

3. The gospel of the cross is the fountainhead of the gospel of the kingdom. It is the gate through which all the blessings of the kingdom are to be gained. ... the broader blessings of the gospel are attained only by means of forgiveness through the cross, and because those broader blessings are attained *infallibly* by means of forgiveness through the cross... [p.109]
 4. Zooming in and Out --There are some texts where the author uses the gospel in wide and then zoom form: Acts 13:26-40 and Col 1:15-23 served as examples.
- E. Putting It *All* Together -- DeYoung and Gilbert integrate “the Gospel” definitions. Let’s back up and look at how God chooses to save people.

Group Discussion 2 – Putting It All Together

In a previous lesson we discussed the call/message of our Sovereign and characterized it as “repent and believe.” We’ve spent this week and last week discussing what we are calling them to believe – the Gospel. It is essential that we understand the nature of this call.

1. How is a sinner reconciled to God? (bottom line: substitution – 2 Cor 5:21)

Lots of good ways to answer this, but I’m looking for “what makes it possible”

2. What is the sinner’s part? (obey--repent and believe)

^{ESV} **Acts 17:30-31** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

3. How does the sinner do it? (he can’t – he’s dead in sin)

^{ESV} **Colossians 2:13-14** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:1-5** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--

With man it is impossible

^{ESV} **Mark 10:23** And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

No one can come to me

^{ESV} **John 6:44** No one **can** come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. **[emphasis added]**

<1410> δύναμαι *dunamai*

Meaning: *to be able, to have power*

4. Is God commanding the **impossible** of sinners?! Yes. (ref. exercise ...**and then what?**)

Nature of the call to repent and believe... impossible – a gift/granted by God

➤ *Repentance is granted by God*

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance** leading to a knowledge of the truth,

^{ESV} **Acts 11:18** When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also **God has granted repentance** that leads to life."

➤ *Faith is granted by God "come to me" = believing trust/faith*

John 6: Drawn by the Father and given to the Son

^{ESV} **John 6:37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever³ comes to me I will never cast out.

^{ESV} **John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws** him. And I will raise him up on the last day. [*emphasis added*]

<1670> ἔλκω *helko*

Meaning: to drag

Origin: a prim. vb.

Usage: drag(1), dragged(2), draw(1), draws(1), drew(2), haul(1).

^{ESV} **John 12:32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will **draw** all people to myself." (cf. Jn 10:16;11:52)

^{ESV} **John 18:10** ... Peter, having a sword, **drew** it and struck the high priest's servant ...

^{ESV} **John 21:6** He said to them, "Cast the net ... they cast it, ... they were not able to **haul** it in...

^{ESV} **John 21:11** So Simon Peter went aboard and **hauled** the net ashore...

^{ESV} **Acts 16:19** ...,they seized Paul and Silas and **dragged** them into the marketplace before the rulers.

^{ESV} **Acts 21:30** They seized Paul and **dragged** him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.

^{ESV} **James 2:6** Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who **drag** you into court?

I know this is heavy and it is understandably tempting to look at this as unfair. If you are seeing this as "God dragging people kicking and screaming into his Kingdom against their will", this is not the case. It would be more accurate to think of it as God rescuing (like a fireman might drag and unconscious victim) undeserving, rebellious, dead-in-sin sinners and giving them life.

- As ambassadors, we must understand the nature of the call to repent and believe the gospel. It is impossible with man. Every true believer is a walking miracle, a spiritual resurrection.

³ *What About All the Whosoever Verses?* There are a number of texts that equate "those who believe" with "those who are saved" and they give us great comfort in God's promise to save. What do these texts say about *how* people come to believe? E.g. John 3:16; Romans 10:13; John 6:37 ...

Implications:

- Knowing that salvation is impossible with man helps us to trust God to His word rather than our techniques.
- We are not free from the responsibility to proclaim the gospel; we are free to proclaim it, knowing that it is God who grants repentance and draws people to himself and we are his chosen instruments “God making his appeal through us” for that proclamation.

Breakout 2 – The Foolishness of the Gospel -- “Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners”

1. Do you understand how absurd/nonsensical that sounds?

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 1:18-24** For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

2. Biblical evangelism-- *Law to the proud, grace to the broken.*

Do you understand why “Jesus loves you so much he died for you” might be met with responses like these?

- Why would he do a silly thing like that? / Who asked him to?
- So what? (What did it accomplish?)
- This God of yours loves me (*how could he not?*) and this is the best he could do for me? What’s behind door #2? (*How about three wishes?*)

Thabiti Anyabwile video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_JY5LYdMNc

3. *The Riddle of the Old Testament -- How can both be true?*

^{ESV} **Exodus 34:6-7** The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

- How can God be both just and gracious?

If Time Permits...

In our membership interviews, we now ask people to tell us the one minute version of the gospel. If people have claimed to have repented and believed... it is a good idea to find out what they have believed! On my website (objectivegospel.org) I am collecting good examples of teachers giving the gospel in a minute or two. I want you to listen closely for some key themes, especially as related to the material we have covered so far in the course.

- Holiness
- Justice
- Sin
- Love
- Substitution (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)
- Repentance
- Belief/Faith

Conclusion

As ambassadors for Christ it is important to represent him faithfully. It is important that we be able to clearly and accurately represent His character (what He's like) and His message (what he has to say). Next we'll begin our study of those to whom we are sent.

Recommended Resources

Substance of the Gospel:

Putting Amazing Back into Grace: Embracing the Heart of the Gospel by Mike Horton
Nine Marks of a Healthy Church by Mark Dever (specifically the third mark)

Nature of the Gospel Call:

What is the Mission of the Church by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert
The God Who Justifies and Drawn by the Father by James White
Chosen by God by R.C. Sproul
Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God by J. I. Packer