

An abstract graphic consisting of several thin, white, parallel lines that originate from the bottom left and extend towards the top right corner of the image. The lines are slightly curved and vary in length, creating a sense of movement and depth against the solid blue background.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

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By Nico van Zyl

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The gospel of God

While Jesus Christ was on this earth, He began His public ministry with the words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15 ESV). When Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome, he said the following:

“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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”” (Romans 1:16-17 ESV)

The word gospel means “good news” and in the context of the Bible it means “the good news of God to the world.” You will not see the good news of God as good at all unless you know of the plight of your soul before God. We have a great need before God. We sinned against God and we stand guilty before him. Our natures are corrupt. We have wicked hearts. We have done evil and therefore we deserve God’s judgement. We deserve to go to hell because we are evil and stand guilty before God. Before people will appreciate the gospel, they have to see their desperate need for a Savior!

The first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called the four gospels. They are orderly accounts of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and what He did and said while he lived on this earth. We can say that they give us different angles or portraits of the truth of Jesus Christ. Just as four different painters who draw the same landscape or mountain would capture different truths about the particular mountain or landscape so each writer of the four gospels captured different truths and put different emphases on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. All four gospels reveal truth about Jesus Christ, His Person and His work on earth. The gospel deals with the

Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The gospel deals with redemption accomplished through Christ and His redemption applied through the Holy Spirit.

In the letters of Paul in the New Testament we get a clearer focus on the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some Biblical scholars differentiate between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of salvation in the New Testament and in the letters of Paul. The gospel of the kingdom they say deals with the rule and authority of Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation deals with how God saves people from their sins. I will not differentiate between these two gospels, but treat them as one, because both of these themes in the Bible come together in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The Bible makes it clear that it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). It is through the word of God, the gospel being preached, (1 Corinthians 1:18) which is the word of truth, that people are saved from their sins and are born again by the Holy Spirit. People cannot be saved from the wrath of God and from their sins by mere education or doing good works or being baptized or by just confessing their sins to God. There needs to be a power encounter with God in the Holy Spirit whereby people hear the truth of the gospel and believe the truth of the gospel. I will elaborate on this truth later. Peter the apostle said:

“since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the **good news** that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:23-25 ESV).

Here is a Biblical definition of the gospel of God:

- 1) God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, into this world, to Israel, as prophesied in the Scriptures, in history about 2000 years ago.
- 2) He was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit, in Mary, his earthly mother.
- 3) Jesus Christ was and is God in the flesh, in human form. He was also truly a human being who got sick and tired and hungry as all humans do. He had a real human nature.
- 4) He lived a blameless, sinless life, fulfilled the righteousness of the law on behalf of his people, and exhibited the righteousness and nature of God in a perfect way.
- 5) He died a substitutionary death on behalf of His people, satisfied the justice of God (the just requirement of the law), absorbed and set aside the wrath of God on behalf His people.
- 6) After three days He physically rose from the dead and thereby conquered the power of death, Satan, sin and sinful human nature. God vindicated Jesus Christ by raising Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and declared Him to be the Son of God.
- 7) After 40 days, after His death, Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father while all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Him.
- 8) Everyone who repents of their sins and believes in the Person of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death (finished work), receiving Him as Lord and Savior and Righteousness, will be reconciled to God,
- 9) will be given the Holy Spirit as an everlasting gift, will receive eternal life, justification, forgiveness of sins, life-long sanctification in the Holy Spirit, an inheritance in heaven, will be adopted as God's son or daughter and be glorified with a new body once Christ returns

I want to summarize the gospel as the accomplishment of redemption in Christ and the application of redemption in Christ. The gospel involves both of these realities. The gospel is essentially not good unless it is applied to the elect, those who believe and repent of their sins. We can

also say that the gospel is not good until each believer are eternally glorified. Because that is the reason Christ came, to save us from the guilt, power and presence of sin. Full salvation will only happen in heaven.

Let's unpack this definition one point at a time:

1) God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, into this world, to Israel, as prophesied in the Scriptures, in history, 2000 years ago.

We see this truth very clearly in the gospel of John. Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God sent into this world. Jesus Christ never had a beginning. He is Everlasting. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..(John 1:1-3;14). The letter of Hebrews makes it very clear that Jesus Christ is God, the exact representation (replica) of the Father and the radiance of His glory (Hebrews 1:3). Christians believe in the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit eternally existing in three Persons, equal in essence and nature but having different roles. The fact that Jesus is called the Son of God doesn't mean that there was physical sex with Mary his earthly mother and God. That concept would be blasphemous. God is Spirit and cannot have sex with humans. He is holy. Jesus Christ is called the only Begotten Son of God the Father, meaning He has a special relationship with the Father that born again children don't have and cannot have, as He is God. God sent Christ into this world in history to Israel. The fact that Jesus would come to the world and what he would do, were prophesied in the Scriptures given by God to His people over many centuries. The people of God expected the Messiah to come. Jesus fulfilled more than 300 prophecies in his life, death and resurrection. We call Jesus becoming a human, the incarnation of God. It is important to realize that Jesus was the Only Begotten of the Father, there were not

many incarnations of God in history (Hebrews 9:22-28), there was only one. He came in the fullness of time.

2) He was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit in Mary his early mother

The Bible makes it clear that the birth of Jesus Christ was a miracle (Matthew 1:18-25). It cannot be repeated by a human being or through experimentation. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-80). Jesus was called Emmanuel, which means God with us, to fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. He was born of God, without sexual union. Mary was a virgin.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary.....And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:26-27, 30-35 ESV).

3) Jesus Christ was and is God in the flesh, in human form. He was also truly a human being who got sick and tired and hungry as all humans do. He had a real human nature.

Some people in history have tried to show that Jesus was not really a human but was like a spirit in the form of a human. The Bible makes it

very clear, however, that Jesus was really a human. He slept and ate and got tired and cried and worked with his hands as a carpenter before His public ministry. The book of Hebrews goes so far as to say that He was tempted in all respects as we are tempted yet being without sin (Hebrews 4:14-16).

4) He lived a blameless, sinless life, fulfilled the righteousness of the law on behalf of his people, and exhibited the righteousness and nature of God in a perfect way.

A few times in the Scriptures the Bible makes it clear that Jesus Christ never sinned. He never sinned in thought, word, action, attitude or in his disposition. He lived a perfect life and so obtained a perfect righteousness. That is one of the reasons God came to earth, to live the life we could never live and to become a perfect Savior for us. If Jesus had sinned once in His life, if He ever made one mistake He wouldn't be able to save us from our sins, because then He would also need a Savior to save him from his sins. We know that the punishment of sin is death (Romans 6:23). If Jesus had ever sinned once then He had to die for his own sins.

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He **committed no sin**, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23 ESV).

“For our sake he made him to be sin who **knew no sin**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin**” (Hebrews 4:15 ESV).

Jesus came to obey all the laws of the Old Testament in a perfect way. He came to satisfy the just requirements of the law so that He can justify us. Jesus did not only die in our place as a substitute but he also lived a perfect life as our substitute so that by faith in Him we can stand perfect before God. Jesus Christ came to live a perfect life on our behalf so that through Him we can be accepted by God. In union with Christ, God doesn't look at us through the things we have done, but through the merits and achievements of Christ. The whole of Jesus' life was a life of perfection. Jesus Christ exhibited the perfect divine nature of God in all that He did. Not only did the hundreds of miracles of Jesus exhibit the compassion and love of God in a perfect way but also God's holiness and His hatred for sin and for sinful hypocrites. We see the full panorama of God's perfections shine through and on display through the life of Christ Jesus. And God reckons Christ's righteousness to us when we trust in Him. The righteousness of Christ accounted to the believer becomes the ground of our justification before God. Without that righteousness accounted to us by faith no one will see God!

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4 ESV).

5) He died a substitutionary death on behalf of His people, satisfied the justice of God (the just requirement of the law), absorbed and set aside the wrath of God on behalf His people.

Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) He did not die for His own sins, because He was sinless. He died for the sins of His people. He laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:15). He gave His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). He was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). He came to reconcile the world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:17-19). He did not only die for His people among the Jews but for the whole world. The world in these passages means that God has a people across the world, in every nation, and tribe and language group and ethnicity (See Revelation 5:9; 7:9). Jesus didn't pay for every sin of every man that has ever lived. If that be the case then every person would go to heaven, because then the sin of unbelief, of not believing in Jesus, would also be forgiven. But the Bible makes it clear that He bore the sins of His people on the cross. He did not only make salvation and forgiveness of sins possible, He actually paid for the sins of His elect across the world. He actually purchased eternal salvation for His people. With His own blood being spilled He purchased faith and repentance as well for those who He would draw to Himself.

The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22). That is why Jesus had to die. The punishment of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:20). Because Jesus never sinned and because he was God his death could atone for the sins of believers. The punishment we deserve is infinite and unlimited. But Jesus Christ was God and only He could absorb and set aside the anger of God because He was and is the infinite worthy and valuable God. No one else could atone for our sins, because no one else was able to absorb the unlimited wrath of God. No one else could because all have sinned and have fallen under God's judgement. We were all separated from the glory of God. Jesus satisfied the justice of God, because He was God who obeyed the law perfectly and obtained a perfect experiential obedience to the law. He died as a substitute and fulfilled all the animal sacrifices given as requirements in the old covenant on that cross. He set us free from the curse of the law by

becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). He was the propitiation for the sins of his people (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

Jesus Christ came to save us from God, (His wrath against sin) by God (the Holy Spirit) for God (His glory) and in God (the Holy Spirit).

When Jesus cried out the words: “it is finished” it meant Jesus did everything necessary to reconcile us to God. Jesus was abandoned by His Father, in his human nature, on the cross, so that we can be accepted. He was rejected so that we can be adopted into His family. He was cursed on our behalf so that we can be eternally blessed in the Holy Spirit!

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-26 ESV).

6) After three days He physically rose from the dead and thereby conquered the power of death, Satan, sin and sinful human nature. God vindicated Jesus Christ by raising Him from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and declared Him to be the Son of God.

The Bible makes it very clear that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and the glory of the Father (Ephesians 1:18-20; Romans 8:9-11; Romans 6:4). The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead in a glorified body proved that God accepted His sacrifice and that He was the only Begotten Son of God (Romans 1:4). Because Jesus never sinned death could not hold Him in the grave. He didn't die for his own sin, but for the sin of His people, His elect people. All the

gospels make it clear that there were eyewitnesses who saw Jesus in a glorified body (See John 21:1-10; Matthew 28:1-11; Luke 24:1-10; Mark 16:1-10). Paul the apostle said that if we don't believe that Jesus Christ rose physically from the dead in a spiritual, incorruptible body, our faith is worthless and that we are still in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:11-21). Sin came into the world through Adam, the first representative of mankind. Through the last or second Adam, Jesus Christ, the second representation of humanity comes eternal life, forgiveness of sins and victory over death and sin (See Romans 5:12-21). Jesus conquered Satan on the cross because He never gave into sin when tempted. He broke the power of sins, because He was God who never sinned, and He broke the power of death, because He died a substitutionary death and because he absorbed and set aside the coming wrath of God against sin for those who believe.

“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14-15 ESV).

“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, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Colossians 2:13-15 ESV).

In Adam we all died but through Jesus Christ we will all be made alive (1 Corinthians 5:22). Adam catapulted the human race into misery, death and the slavery of sins, but through Jesus Christ believers will have eternal life, hope and joy.

7) After 40 days after His death Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father while all authority in heaven and earth has been given unto Him

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given unto Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Jesus ascended into heaven on a cloud (Acts 1:11). He is seated at the right hand of the Father and all principalities and power and angels and every name that can be named in this world and in the next is submitted unto His authority (See Ephesians 1:20-22; Phillipians 2:5-11). All judgment has been given unto Jesus Christ (John 5:22). He will judge the living and the dead from all ages to come (Revelation 20:10-15). He is now the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Nothing and no one has more power than Him. Every knee will one day bow and declare that He is Lord and King even if they now refuse to do so. Because of His work of salvation He has this position in the universe. It is not a question of accepting Him as Lord but of submitting to Him as the Lord of your life. He is Lord and King over all peoples and Angels and Demons. It is a case of submitting and subjecting under his supreme authority, willingly or unwillingly.

8) Everyone who repents of their sins and believes in the Person of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death (finished work), receiving Him as Lord and Savior and Righteousness, will be reconciled to God.

Although God has reconciled His people to Himself, the recipients of His grace don't receive it automatically. We are commanded to repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ in order to receive His salvation. Salvation is a free gift to be received by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:4-6; Romans 3:24-26; Romans 6:23). Everyone who receives Christ, who believes in His Name, God has given the right to become children of God (John 1:12). But we receive this gift by biblical repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot have saving faith without biblical repentance. You cannot

believe savingly without turning to Jesus Christ. If your eyes are fixed on the things of this world and the pleasures of sins and self-righteousness you wouldn't be able to see the glory of Christ. Biblical repentance involves, a change of heart (contrition) a change of mind (conviction), admission of your guilt (confession) and a change of behavior (conversion). Unless the Holy Spirit makes you aware of your sins, unless the Holy Spirit makes you alive (Ephesians 2:1-5) and unless you subsequently confess your sins to God and be broken over it (Psalm 34:18; Psalm 51:17) you wouldn't be able to see the preciousness and worth of God. Biblical repentance (2 Timothy 2:20) and genuine faith in Christ are gifts given by God through Jesus Christ and were purchased by the blood of Christ. If we repent in a biblical way and believe in Christ, it will be the work of God, although we are not passive in this process. We are involved in repentance and faith in Jesus. It is not our repentance and faith that saves us from the wrath of God and our sins, but it is Christ who saves us. We should never make faith meritorious. Repentance and faith are just the channels that connect us to the supreme Treasure, Lord and Savior, who is Jesus Christ. It is Christ alone who saves in the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12).

We have to receive Christ as our Lord and Savior and Righteousness to be saved from our sins (John 1:12). We cannot think we only want Jesus to save us from our sins but not want Him to be our Ruler and King. If we don't submit to Him as Ruler of our lives, then we have a Christ of our own imagination. We have to receive Christ for who He is, Lord, Savior and our Treasure of righteousness. We have to receive Christ as God.

The gospel of God is not good news unless it actually reconciles us to God. In His book, "God is the gospel" John Piper makes it clear that all the benefits of the gospel: forgiveness of sins, deliverance from sins, escape from hell, an inheritance in heaven, peace of mind etc. wouldn't be good unless they bring us into fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit (1 John 1:4-7; 1 Peter 3:18). This is a very important aspect of the gospel.

Many people want all the benefits of the gospel but they don't want God! They don't love the beauty and glory and being of Christ. They don't love and esteem the holiness of God. They don't want to be inconvenienced and suffer for the gospel. They only want the blessings of God but not the being of a holy God in their lives. If God does not reconcile us to Himself and if we don't receive the Holy Spirit as an abiding reality in us, making His home within us, then Jesus who died and suffered on the cross would have been senseless and useless.

9. Will be given the Holy Spirit as an everlasting gift, will receive eternal life, justification, forgiveness of sins, life-long sanctification in the Holy Spirit, an inheritance in heaven, will be adopted as God's son or daughter and be glorified with a new body once Christ returns

With receiving Christ in your life, you receive all the spiritual blessings in heavenly places which includes: the fullness of the Holy Spirit, justification, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from your sins and the power of Satan, an inheritance in heaven and many more to come in the new heavens and the new earth. By faith in Jesus Christ we are declared righteous in God's sight and are therefore justified in God's courtroom. If God did not spare His only begotten Son but gave Him for us all will He not give us all things beneficial, which also includes suffering and tribulation that would make us conformed to Christ's image? (Romans 8:32-37). With the Holy Spirit within us the love of God is poured out into our hearts (Romans 5:5). No eye has seen and no ear has heard what God has prepared for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (1 Corinthians 2:9). With receiving Christ as your brother and Savior and Lord and the Holy Spirit you are adopted as God's child (Romans 8:16; Galatians 4:3-9). Having Christ and the Holy Spirit in your life you become part of the family of God.

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we

cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:15-17 ESV).

This gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes!

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