

The Gospel in its Narrow Sense

What is the gospel in its narrow sense? It has often been described as “*the good news of our salvation in Jesus.*” It could also be described as *the good news of what God has done, is doing, and will do for our salvation.* The good news of what God has done is that “*God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son*” (John 3:16). God sent Jesus to redeem us. By His sinless conception and birth, He atoned for our sinful conception and birth. By His holy life, He carried out God’s will for us. By His substitutionary death, He suffered the punishment for our sins. God has declared the world not guilty for the sake of Christ.

The gospel always has a tone of completeness about it. It doesn’t announce to us what we must do. It rather speaks to us of what God has done for us. Jesus said to the paralytic, “*Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven*” (Matthew 9:2). The synergist and the Arminian (Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches, Anabaptist Churches and Methodist Churches) would have said, “Take heart, son, for if you make the right choice or do the right thing, then your sins will be forgiven.” The Calvinist (Reformed churches like the Anglican and Uniting) would have said, “Take heart, son, if you can figure out whether your sins were forgiven.” Jesus said, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” There are no conditions. There are no questions. The message is simple. God has forgiven us for Jesus’ sake. Jesus said on the cross, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). There is no further need for any sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 10:10-14).

What is God doing for our salvation? He has brought us to faith in Jesus and is preserving us in faith in Jesus. He does this through the means of grace, for the gospel is the “*power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16). Through the gospel the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and preserves us in faith in Jesus. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “*We also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13).

What will God do for our salvation? “*Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). On the day of judgment, believers will hear Jesus say, “*Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34).

Then believers will see the fulfilment of the vision John saw in Revelation: *“These are the people who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, they are before the throne of God and keep serving Him day and night in His Temple, and He who is sitting on the throne will shelter them with His tent. ¹⁶ They will not be hungry any longer or thirsty any longer. The sun will certainly not beat on them or any scorching heat, ¹⁷ because the Lamb, who is in the middle of the throne, will be their Shepherd and lead them to springs of the water of life. God will wipe every tear from their eyes”* (Revelation 7:14-17).

The Formula of Concord describes the gospel in this way: *As a result, the gospel in its strict sense teaches what people should believe, namely, that they receive from God the forgiveness of sins; that is, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon himself the curse of the law and borne it, atoned and paid for all our sins; that through him alone we are restored to God's grace, obtain the forgiveness of sins through faith, and are delivered from death and all the punishments of our sins and are saved eternally.*

For everything that provides comfort-everything that offers the favour and grace of God to those who have transgressed the law - is and is called the gospel in the strict sense. It is good news, joyous news, that God does not want to punish sin but to forgive it for Christ's sake. (FC SD V:20,21)