NINE MARKS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

MARK 3: THE GOSPEL

In the past two sessions, we've seen the importance of having a sound doctrine preached in our churches that is grounded in the Bible. It is particularly important that our churches have sound biblical theology in one special area – in our understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel. The gospel is at the heart of Christianity, and so it should be at the heart of our churches.

1. WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The gospel is the good news about what God has done to save sinners through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. It begins with bad news about man's condition:

1. All people are accountable to God, who is our holy Creator and Lord, and who is worthy of our worship and obedience.
2. All people have rebelled against God, continually sin against God, and are therefore objects of God's wrath.

> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. . . For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom 1:18, 21-23) See also Rom 2:1-2; 3:10b-11.*

With this foundation, we can hear the good news that follows it:

1. Through putting Christ forward as a propitiation, God has made a way for guilty sinners to have their sins wiped out, to have God's wrath turned away from them, and to be declared righteous in God's sight.
2. The way we receive this salvation is through faith in Jesus, by trusting him alone to save us, not any good works that we do.

> *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fallen 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. (Rom 3:21-25)*

The gospel can be summed up with four headings: God, Man, Christ and Response.

1. GOD, THE RIGHTEOUS CREATOR

A right understanding of the gospel begins with a right understanding of God: that he is the righteous Creator, and that we are all accountable to him.

> *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth… Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen 1:1, 26a, 27)*

Countless passages in Scripture testify that God is perfectly holy and righteous and that he will judge all people according to what they have done.

> *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:30-31). See also, Ex 34:6-7a; 1 John 1:5.*

2. MAN – GUILTY BECAUSE OF SIN

Humanity's fundamental problem is that we are all sinners by nature and by choice, and are therefore subject to the wrath of God.

> *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23)*
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> *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Eph 5:5-6)*

3. CHRIST – THE PERFECT SUBSTITUTE

In his death on the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied God's wrath against all those who would turn from their sin and trust in him. The heart of the gospel is the good news that Jesus has accomplished salvation for us through his death and resurrection.

> *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:4-5)*
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> *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 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." (Col 1:21-22)*

4. RESPONSE – REPENT AND BELIEVE

Christ's death and resurrection requires a response: The gospel calls all people to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved.

> *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9)*

2. HOW DOES THE GOSPEL INFLUENCE OUR LIVES AND CHURCH?

The gospel is not only the means by which we become Christians, but it is also the means by which we grow as Christians, both individually and corporately:

1. THE GOSPEL-CENTRED LIFE

Through faith in Christ, not only are we forgiven of our sins, but we are also given an entirely new nature. When we put our faith in Christ, our old self died – in fact, our old self was crucified – and we were raised to a new spiritual life through union with Christ.

> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). See also, Romans 6:4-7.*

2. THE GOSPEL-DRIVEN CHURCH

The gospel not only frees us from sins individually, it also equips us to live together as a church in a way that builds unity, helps others grow spiritually, and brings glory to God.

> *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from his love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind (Phil 2:1-2). See also 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 and Romans 12:4-6.*