

## Acts 2:37-40 - The Gospel

I want to look today at the question: What is the gospel? Jesus Christ told us:

Mark 16:15

*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

他又对他们说：你们往普天下去，传福音给万民听。

And we're told that the gospel will be preached to the whole world before Christ returns:

Matthew 24:14

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

这天国的福音要传遍天下，对万民作见证，然后末期才来到。

But what is the gospel? The word “*gospel*” means “good news.” And Christians have very good news to give to the world. But there's a lot of confusion today about what this good news actually is. Many people are very keen to spread the gospel, and that's good. But, whether they realise it or not, the message they preach isn't actually the gospel Jesus Christ gave to us. And I just want to give you several modern-day examples:

– Jesus Christ can give you a sense of self-worth, self-esteem and self-confidence. That's not the gospel. That's humanist psychology in Christian clothing. The humanists say we can produce these things in ourselves, whereas the Christianised version says we receive them through Christ, that's the only difference. In fact it's the opposite of Christianity. Christianity teaches self-abasement. And what the humanist calls self-esteem, the Bible has another word for it – “*pride*.” And the Bible says:

Proverbs 16:18

*“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.”*

骄傲在败坏以先，狂心在跌倒之前。

James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

*“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”*

神阻挡骄傲的人，赐恩给谦卑的人。

– Jesus Christ has dealt with sin, so don't let it bother you any more. Just think positive thoughts about yourself. That's not the gospel either, that's Positive Thinking. There was a popular book in the 1950s called “*The Power of Positive Thinking*,” and it was written by a Christian minister. But “positive thinking” is not facing reality. It's like if you fall down a well. Positive thinking says, “It's not dark and I'm not down here.” You can say that as much as you like, but it is dark and you are down there.

– God’s got a wonderful purpose for your life. All you have to do is find out what it is and do it. Well, that’s “The Purpose Driven Life,” and it’s another very popular book. But that’s not the gospel either. There’s nothing whatsoever in it about sin, forgiveness, repentance, Christ dying on the cross. Nothing.

– Jesus Christ can give you health, wealth and prosperity in this world. That’s not the gospel either. But it’s all over the so-called “Christian” television channels. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but everybody who teaches this will tell you that, before you can get these things, you’ve got to, as they say, “sow a seed” first. In other words, give them money first, then wait for the blessing. Of course, the blessing never comes. The only ones who become prosperous are the ones that get your money. It’s a scam. Jesus said:

Matthew 6:24

*“Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* 你们不能又事奉神，又事奉玛门。

John 12:25

*“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”*

爱惜自己生命的，就丧失生命。在这世上恨恶自己生命的，就要保守生命到永生。

– Jesus loves you. All you need to do is realise that and be happy about it. But if Jesus loves us the way we are, there’s no incentive to change in any way. People walk out of the service in exactly the same condition as they went in. They might be a bit happier, now knowing Jesus loves them, but they go out to live their lives in exactly the same worldly, self-centred way they did before. In fact, this message encourages us to carry on with the life we’re living, in case, if we do change, He might stop loving us.

- Say sorry for your sins, then make a decision to follow Christ. That’s not the gospel either. It’s far more than merely making a mental decision. If the gospel is simply to get people to make a decision for Christ, there’s always the possibility that at sometime in the future they might decide not to follow Christ any more, and follow somebody else.

The gospel isn’t any of these. But I’ve heard all these from modern-day preachers. So what I want to do is to go through the book of Acts to see how the apostles preached the gospel. What message did they have? What good news did they have for the world? That’s the good news we should have as well. That’s the message we should be preaching. And we shouldn’t be sidetracked or deceived into preaching anything else.

**Acts 2:37-40**

*37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

众人听见这话，觉得扎心，就对彼得和其余的使徒说：“弟兄们，我们当怎样行？”

What had the people heard that troubled them so much? We find that out in verse 36:

Acts 2:36

*Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

故此，以色列全家当确实地知道：你们钉在十字架上的这位耶稣，神已经立他为主、为基督了。

The people Peter was talking to, had agreed with putting Christ to death. They may not have actually performed the deed itself. Maybe they'd been in the crowd crying, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" But now, Peter tells them that they'd put to death the one who was both Lord and Christ – the Saviour that had been prophesied throughout their Old Testament scriptures. And as they listened to Peter, they suddenly realised what they'd done, and were mortified and cried out, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*"

But we say, surely that doesn't apply to us. We weren't there in Christ's day, so we're not responsible for His death. But in a sense, it does apply to us. If we had been there, we would probably have done exactly the same.

We're very good at following a crowd. The crowd was calling for Christ's death. If we'd have been there, we'd have gone along with them. And, anyway, Jesus is not the sort of leader we naturally want. To us, He's weak and powerless. If we're going to follow somebody, we'd rather have a strong leader. A powerful, forceful man. So we'd say:

Luke 19:14

*We will not have this man to reign over us* 我们不愿意这个人做我们的王。

So naturally, we don't really think much of Him at all. What use is He to anybody today? He's just an irrelevant figure from many years ago. So, really, we're no different from the men Peter was speaking to. But He's the Lord of glory. He's God in human flesh:

John 1:14

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* 道成了肉身，住在我们中间

John 7:46

*Never man spake like this man.* 从来没有像他这样说话的

So we ought to be troubled in our hearts, just like the people here, for what we've thought about Jesus Christ in the past. All He used to be to us was a swear word. How badly we've treated Him! Aren't we now ashamed in any way for that? We should be desperately asking the same question as these people: "*What shall we do?*"

Well, the good news, the gospel, is that we can do something. God hasn't left us alone. He could've done, if He'd wanted to, and we couldn't complain about any punishment He would want to inflict on us. But He's a merciful God. So what is it that we can do?

*38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

彼得说：“你们各人要悔改，奉耶稣基督的名受洗，叫你们的罪得赦，就必领受所赐的圣灵。

This is the gospel in a nutshell. A lot of people call John 3:16 “the gospel in an nutshell,” but I’m not so sure it is. It’s a good verse to know, but I don’t think it deserves that title:

John 3:16

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

神爱世人，甚至将他的独生子赐给他们，叫一切信他的不致灭亡，反得永生。

The call there is to believe in Christ, which is good as far as it goes, but there’s no mention whatsoever of repentance. So really it’s only half a gospel at best. Acts 2:38 is the true “gospel in a nutshell.” This is the one we should be using as our template.

And the first thing we must do is *repent*. That’s far more than simply being sorry for something we’ve done. It also involves a firm resolve to change our ways. It’s quite common for people to be sorry for something, and they might even say they won’t do it again, especially if there’s a possible punishment involved. But there’s no real commitment about it. Given the same circumstances, they probably would do it again.

Judas was sorry for what he did, but he ended up seeing no hope and hanging himself:

Matthew 27:3-5

*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

这时候，卖耶稣的犹大看见耶稣已经定了罪，就后悔，把那三十块钱拿回来给祭司长和长老，说：“我卖了无辜之人的血，是有罪了。”他们说：“那与我们有什么相干？你自己承当吧！”犹大就把那银钱丢在殿里，出去吊死了。

And we’re told about Esau:

Hebrews 12:17

*For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

后来想要承受父所祝的福，竟被弃绝，虽然号哭切求，却得不着门路使他父亲的心意回转，这是你们知道的。

Both Judas and Esau wanted to repent, but in their hearts, they also didn't really want to change. True repentance can only be found if we truly, seriously want to leave our sin. If we still love it in our hearts, even just a little, we'll never be able to truly repent before God. We really need to hate ourselves for what we've done in the past. And, more than that, hate ourselves for what we're like by nature, because we're always doing it. That's the beginning of true repentance. And we all need to come to that point.

So we're told to *repent*. And then we're told we must be *baptised*. Now when we normally think of baptism, we think of an outward ceremony using water. But we have to be careful here. It can't be true that an outward ceremony performed by men is the only gateway into heaven. Otherwise men make the final decision who gets in and who doesn't. That's what the Roman Catholic church actually believes. So if a baby is dying, they have to quickly get the priest to baptise it with water before it dies. But that's not right. Men don't have the keys to heaven like that. The thief on the cross was never baptised in water, yet he got to heaven.

What we're talking about here is a spiritual baptism. A baptism of the Holy Spirit. Christ told the disciples about this as He ascended to heaven:

Acts 1:5

*For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

约翰是用水施洗，但不多几日，你们要受圣灵的洗。

If we become a Christian, we should get baptised with water. But it's only ever an outward sign. It doesn't do anything in itself. It's simply a witness to the world of an inner spiritual baptism that has happened to us. True baptism is invisible, a baptism of the Holy Spirit. We can't see it. But we can experience it. And that's what's meant here.

Christ once said something very important:

John 3:3

*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

人若不重生，就不能见神的国。

And this is the fundamental principle of the Christian faith. We must be born again, changed from within, otherwise, no matter how much we call ourselves a Christian, we've never actually see the kingdom of God at all.

2 Corinthians 5:17

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

若有人在基督里，他就是新造的人，旧事已过，都变成新的了。

So we must want to be finished living for ourselves and want to be changed by God. And the good news is that this is possible. We can have a new start. And it's free of charge.

Isaiah 55:1, 6-7

*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

你们一切干渴的，都当就近水来！没有银钱的，也可以来！你们都来，买了吃。不用银钱，不用价值，也来买酒和奶。....当趁耶和華可寻找的时候寻找他，相近的时候求告他。恶人当离弃自己的道路，不义的人当除掉自己的意念。归向耶和華，耶和華就必怜恤他；当归向我们的神，因为神必广行赦免。

Continuing in v.38, we're to:

*be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

你们各人要悔改，奉耶稣基督的名受洗，叫你们的罪得赦，就必领受所赐的圣灵。

We must come to Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. No other religious leader can forgive sins. They're just men. The pope, Mohammed, Buddha, they're all powerless.

Mark 2:7

“Who can forgive sins but God only?” 除了神以外，谁能赦罪呢？

Jesus Christ is God. He died on the cross to take the punishment for the sins of all those who would come to Him. That's the purpose He came into this world. It's Him we must approach for the forgiveness of sins, because He's the only one who has paid the price, who gave Himself for us. He's the only one who can offer us forgiveness for all our sins.

John 8:36

*If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

所以天父的儿子若叫你们自由，你们就真自由了。

And we're told that if we do come to Him, we “shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” That's the new birth. That's Christ changing our heart, and giving us a new heart. Then the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, and we become completely new creatures. The Holy Spirit is a Comforter and a guide to us. He's always there, inside us, showing us the way we should live. That's the confidence we can have. Not confidence in ourselves, but confidence in the Lord showing us the way, through the Holy Spirit living within us.

That is the gospel message we have to give the world. The opportunity to be born again, to be changed by the Lord, to become new creatures. But to receive this new life, we must first acknowledge we can't change ourselves. Then ask God to change us from the heart, by truly repenting of our sins and calling on Him. If we do this, Christ promised:

John 6:37

*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

凡父所赐给我的人，必到我这里来；到我这里来的，我总不丢弃他。

*39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

因为这应许是给你们和你们的儿女，并一切在远方的人，就是主我们神所召来的。

This gospel, good news, is for everyone. No race or nation is excepted.

Colossians 3:9-11

*Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

因你们已经脱去旧人和旧人的行为，穿上了新人。这新人在知识上渐渐更新，正如造他主的形像。在此并不分希利尼人，犹太人，受割礼的，未受割礼的，化外人，西古提人，为奴的，自主的，惟有基督是包括一切，又住在各人之内。

It's a promise from God, which cannot be broken, and it's free, we don't need to do anything to receive it. Just ask God for it. But very few people do. Why do you think that is? Why should anyone not want to have free forgiveness for their sins?

Well, first of all, we can't see God. Forgiveness of sins, a new heart, the Holy Spirit living within us – it's all invisible. So why should we believe any of it? I can understand why people think that way. But even though we can't see these things, it is possible to personally experience them. Millions of lives have been changed for ever by Jesus Christ. Christians aren't perfect, but they've been changed from the inside.

Another reason we don't want this free gift, is that it requires us to leave our sin. We find true repentance difficult, because we don't want to change. Don't be like Judas or Esau.

And there's an incentive too why we should do this:

*40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*

彼得还用许多话作见证，劝勉他们说：“你们当救自己脱离这弯曲的世代

By nature we're sinful creatures. God is perfectly holy. He won't accept anyone into His presence who is not holy, who hasn't truly repented of their sin. That's why there's going to be a judgment coming on the whole world. And all of us need to be saved from it. That's why the gospel is so important. It's good news to all men because through it, by having our sins freely forgiven, we can escape the judgment to come. We must save ourselves from this untoward generation. Or we perish with them. Let's make sure we're not so attached to our sin, that we can't escape the judgment.

Now, I want to look at a few other occasions in the book of Acts when the gospel is presented, to show that this is the true gospel message that we have.

### **Acts 3:19**

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

所以，你们当悔改归正，使你们的罪得以涂抹，这样那安舒的日子就必从主面前来到

Here's the call again to *repent*, and *be converted*, be changed. Notice the passive tense, *be converted*. Only God can do this. We can't change ourselves. It's so important to acknowledge our inability, before asking the Lord to change us. We'd rather reject the gospel message, than acknowledge we can't do something. We're so proud in ourselves!

The gospel message is so simple, a child could respond to it. But on the other hand, it's so difficult to respond to, because of the pride of our hearts. We don't have to be clever to understand it. We just have to acknowledge we can't respond to it ourselves, unless God changes us. And that's what we find so difficult.

And again we see here that if we do respond to Christ's call, *our sins will be blotted out, and times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord*. Exactly the same gospel message as in chapter 2. Our sins blotted out by Christ's death on the cross, and times of refreshing coming from the Holy Spirit who comes to dwell inside the believer.

### **Acts 17:30-31**

*30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

世人蒙昧无知的时候，神并不监察，如今却吩咐各处的人都要悔改。

*31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*



因为他已经定了日子，要借着他所设立的人按公义审判天下，并且叫他从死里复活，给万人做可信的凭据。

God “*winked at*” our ignorance. That doesn’t mean He sweeps sin under the carpet, God can never do that. But He does allow us to go on in our ignorance for a long time, before He reveals His message of salvation to us.

But, what about people who die without hearing the gospel message at all? They’re still guilty of sin, because we’re all born in sin. So they must still be judged. You might say that’s unfair, but it isn’t. If God doesn’t send the gospel to some people, it’s because He knows they won’t respond. So God isn’t wasting His resources. If He has some of His people in a place where the gospel has never been, He’ll make sure the gospel gets there. He’ll send a missionary or use some other means.

Which is why it’s so important for us to go and spread the gospel to every creature. We are the ordinary means God uses to bring people to Himself. And if He calls us to go to a certain place, we can have confidence that our witness there won’t be a waste of time.

And again we see that God now command all men everywhere to repent, because there’s a day of judgment coming when the world will be judged in righteousness by Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the evidence that this is all true.

In the previous two examples, the Holy Spirit was mentioned, but He isn’t here. But repentance and judgment are. That doesn’t mean this is a different gospel. It’s the same gospel. But we’ve got an important principle here.

We aren’t hawking Christ. We’re not salesmen trying to close a sale. We don’t have a sales technique that we have to use. Like going door to door selling toilet brushes. Jehovah’s Witnesses do that. They have their pat sales technique which, given the opportunity, they go through, their sole purpose being to make converts for themselves. We don’t do that. We’re not salesmen trying to hit a monthly sales target. The gospel should never be treated like that. We care about souls.

And that’s why Paul has changed the way he presented his message here, to fit in with the particular circumstances in Athens. The message still includes a need to repent, and a need to call on Christ to be saved from the judgment to come. The gospel message will always have those elements in it, but we may have to present it differently depending on circumstances. And here’s another example to show this more clearly:

#### **Acts 24:24-25**

*24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.*

过了几天，腓力斯和他夫人犹太的女子土西拉一同来到，就叫了保罗来，听他讲论信基督耶稣的道。

*25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

保罗讲论公义、节制和将来的审判，腓力斯甚觉恐惧，说：“你暂且去吧，等我得便再叫你来。”

This is Paul now in front of Felix, the Roman governor. And look what he is talking with him about: faith in Christ, righteousness, temperance and judgment to come. These are all the elements of the gospel message. But notice Paul is *reasoning* with him. Having a real, genuine two-way conversation. *Reasoning, disputing, persuading, beseeching*, these are the words used in the Bible to describe the way we should bring the gospel to others. Not using a sales technique, with no real concern for the one we're speaking to.

And, once we've done all we can, we must leave it with the Lord. We can't convert anybody. Only God can change hearts. Our job is to present the message as best we can, then we must leave the rest with the Lord. It is possible to be too aggressive in our evangelism as though we're trying to change hearts ourselves. No, we don't do that.

In this case, Felix trembled at the message. He wasn't converted but it affected him. And that's what the gospel should do. It leaves the hearer with less excuse for his sins. But salvation is of the Lord. We leave the actual conversion of the sinner in God's hands.

#### **Acts 26:20**

*But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

先在大马士革，后在耶路撒冷和犹太全地，以及外邦，劝勉他们应当悔改归向神，行事与悔改的心相称。

And finally in this verse we see that the call is to *repent and turn to God*, and “*demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.*” We're calling people to a permanent change of life. Only God can permanently change hearts. We're calling people to be willing to be changed by Him. To hate their own lives so much, they don't want to live that way any more. But instead want to become like Christ in everything they do. We are saved by grace. But we're saved in order to do good works:

#### **Ephesians 2:10**

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

我们原是他的工作，在基督耶稣里造成的，为要叫我们行善，就是神所预备叫我们行的。

No true Christian would ever think that now they've become a Christian, they can sin as

much as they like, and still get to heaven. No. If we've been truly changed, we now hate sin, and we want to get away from it. We now want to please God and keep His commandments. We can say we believe in Christ, but if it hasn't resulted in a complete change of nature, then we don't really believe in Him at all.

This complete change of nature is the only hope for the problems of mankind. No outward political change can ever do this. No religious movement can do it. Only a change of heart in each individual can solve mankind's fundamental problem – selfishness. And only Jesus Christ can change our hearts. When we're called to preach the gospel to every creature, we've got such an important job to do. We should never be ashamed of the gospel, because:

Romans 1:16

*“it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”*

这福音本是神的大能，要救一切相信的

By preaching the gospel, we're the means by which God changes the world one individual at a time. That's the only way the world can be changed. Every other way doesn't address the real problem, the human heart:

Jeremiah 17:9

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

人心比万物都诡诈，坏到极处，谁能识透呢？

The cause of all the problems in the world is the human heart. It needs to change. But we can't do it ourselves. Elsewhere, Jeremiah says:

Jeremiah 13:23

*“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”*

古实人岂能改变皮肤呢？豹岂能改变斑点呢？若能，你们这习惯行恶的便能行善了。

We need the Lord to change us. And we have just such a wonderful message to give the world. It is possible to be changed. How can anyone ignore such a message?

Acts 3:19

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord”*

所以，你们当悔改归正，使你们的罪得以涂抹，这样那安舒的日子就必从主面前来到

May the Lord help us to truly repent and come to the Saviour of the world.