

# What is the Gospel?

## Discipleship Study



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## Discipleship Study Schedule

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### Recommended Supplemental Resources:

- ❖ *Salvation by Allegiance Alone* by Matthew Bates
- ❖ *Gospel Allegiance* by Matthew Bates
- ❖ *Kingdom Conspiracy* by Scot McKnight
- ❖ *King Jesus Gospel* by Scot McKnight
- ❖ *How God Became King* by N. T. Wright
- ❖ *Simply Good News* by N. T. Wright



## **Session #1: Introduction: Don't We All Know the Gospel?**

### **Introduction: Why We Must Get the Gospel Right**

Few things these days in Christianity seem to be a source of unity. We disagree amongst ourselves on almost any issue that arises in conversation. One thing Christians seem to agree upon, however, is that the gospel is central to the Christian faith. It is the message that led to our salvation, and it is the message we must preach to others for their salvation, so naturally we consider it amongst the most important things that we know and share. But here is where unity once again eludes us. Do we agree on the gospel? I suggest that we do not. And for something that serves as the foundation of our own salvation, for our Christian task as disciple-makers and gospel-proclaimers, and for the potential salvation of others, we absolutely must get the gospel right. Too much is at stake for us to miss it.

### **Opening Questions to Consider**

- ❖ What is the gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ Did Jesus preach the gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ Did Jesus preach “your” gospel?
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ What does it mean that the gospel is “good news”?
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ Is our response to the gospel a part of the gospel?

### **The Gospel becomes Our Story; Our Story is not the Gospel**

Too often we share the gospel and limit it to a story of personal salvation: “The gospel is that Jesus saved me from my sin and let me tell you about it.” Although it is certainly true that Jesus saves us from sin, it’s not the gospel. Our story, as important as it is to us, is only a part of a bigger story that God is telling.

There is a Kutless song from years ago called “Sea of Faces” in which the bridge lyrics portray this misguided notion. The song says, “If only my one heart was all you’d gain from all it cost, well I know you would have still been a man with a reason to willingly offer your life.” That’s not the gospel; in fact, that’s not even biblical. Jesus did not nor would not have come to save one man—that’s not good news. Jesus came instead to redeem and restore a creation that we broke; He came to show us what it means to be truly human; He came as the resolution of Israel’s story, their failed story as a nation who was to be a kingdom of priests, but instead needed one man, who was both king and priest, to be the lone faithful Israelite. And through Him, He not only brought salvation to all who believe in him, but He also, as the true king, brought with him a foretaste of the coming kingdom. Jesus came as the resolution to Israel’s story, and that is good news for *the whole world*, because it was always God’s plan to bless the nations through Abraham’s offspring.

So our story is not the gospel; rather, it is one among millions of testimonies to God’s worldwide plan of redemption for now and eternity. That cosmic, world-changing, story of the king who has resolved the problem we created by the means which God promised in the story of Israel, that is the gospel. And my story is a witness to that larger, greater, and better story.

### **Where We Are Headed**

- ❖ Defining the gospel according to Scripture (Jesus, Paul, the Apostles, the Old Testament)
- ❖ Responding biblically to the biblical gospel
- ❖ Learning to share the gospel like the apostles
- ❖ Living out the gospel by being increasingly shaped by the story of the gospel
- ❖ Creating gospel culture

*“For too long, we’ve called unbelievers to ‘invite Jesus into your life.’ Jesus doesn’t want to be in your life. Your life’s a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn’t boring or purposeless or static. It’s wild and exhilarating and unpredictable.”*

*~Russell Moore, "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," Christianity Today (February 2012)*

### **Weekly Challenge**

*This week’s challenge is write your own 100-word statement of the gospel.*

### **Next Session**

*“Session 2: The Gospel According to Jesus.” In preparation, read Mark 1:1-15 and Matthew 4:12-25.*

## **Session #2: The Gospel According to Jesus (Mark 1:14-15)**

### **Prayer and Opening Activity**

*Share with your neighbor a time when you received amazing news. How did it make you feel? What did you do with this news?*

### **Mark 1:14-15**

*Jesus' Gospel Sermon in this passage is short but incredibly important and packed full with meaning.*

- ❖ **Declaration #1:** The time is fulfilled
- ❖ **Declaration #2:** The Kingdom of God has come near
- ❖ **Response #1:** Repent
- ❖ **Response #2:** Believe the Good News

### **1. The time is fulfilled: The Gospel begins with Israel's Story**

### **2. The kingdom of God has come near: The Gospel is Jesus' Story**

### **3. Repent and Believe: The Gospel becomes Our Story**

## **What is the Gospel according to Jesus?**

*The gospel (according to Jesus) is the story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of Israel and the whole world. God created mankind in His image to share in relationship with Him, yet we have rebelled against God and separated ourselves from Him. Yet God promised to send a redeemer who would be king and establish God's kingdom. After years of waiting, Jesus finally arrives to fulfill God's promise—Jesus, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, is shown to be both Lord and king of the whole world through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father!*

## **Application**

1. Repent [Acts 2]—Have you reoriented your life towards Jesus?
2. Believe/Trust [John 20]—Have you placed all your hope in Christ?
3. Make Disciples [Matt 28]—Who are you discipling?

## **Weekly Challenge**

*This week's challenge is to pray each day for God to give you clarity on the three questions of application. Consider journaling through the process and/or sharing the experience with a friend.*

## **Next Session**

*“Session 3: The Gospel According to Paul.” In preparation, read Romans 1:1-17 and Galatians 3:7-4:7.*



## **Session #3: The Gospel According to Paul (Romans 1:1-7)**

### **Prayer and Opening Activity**

Share with your neighbor regarding one of the following questions:

1. How have I demonstrated the characteristics of a disciple this week? How/where am I struggling?
2. How are you doing loving the people God has placed in your life?
3. How has God been speaking to you through your prayer and Scripture reading?

### **Romans 1:1-17**

- ❖ The gospel is concerning God's Son, Jesus
  - Christ
  - Lord
  - Descendent of David
  - Son of God
- ❖ Outcome of this gospel
  - Grace
  - Apostleship
  - Obedience of faith
  - For the sake of the Gentiles

### **1 Corinthians 15:1-6**

- ❖ Death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah

### **Galatians 3:7-4:7**

- ❖ Gospel was preached to Abraham—in his offspring [which Paul goes on to say is offspring singular—Jesus] all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So we learn that Israel's story was the start of the whole world's story of redemption. The end goal of this gospel story is that people from **all nations** would be adopted as God's children.

## **1. The Gospel begins with Israel's Story**

## **2. The Gospel is Jesus' Story**

## **3. The Gospel becomes Our Story**

### **What is the Gospel according to Paul?**

*The gospel (according to Paul) is the story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of Israel and the whole world. God created mankind in His image to share in relationship with Him, yet we have rebelled against God and separated ourselves from Him. Yet God promised to send a redeemer who would be king and establish God's kingdom. After years of waiting, Jesus finally arrives to fulfill God's promise—Jesus, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, is shown to be both Lord and king of the whole world through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father!*

### **Weekly Challenge**

*This week's challenge is to begin memorizing the 100-word definition of the gospel provided in sessions 2 and 3. Also, continue revising your own 100-word definition (from Session #1 challenge) in light of what you've learned in sessions 2 and 3.*

### **Next Session**

*"Session 4: The Gospel According to the Old Testament ." In preparation, read Genesis 3; Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 72.*

## **Session #4: The Gospel and the Old Testament**

**Prayer and Opening Activity:** *Share with your neighbor which ONE Old Testament passage you would choose if it was the only thing you could use to share with an unbeliever.*

### **Biblical Theology of God's Redemption through a Messiah**

❖ Genesis 3

❖ Genesis 12:1-3

❖ Genesis 49

❖ Numbers 23-24

❖ 2 Samuel 7

### **King**

❖ Psalm 2

❖ Psalm 72

## **Kingdom**

❖ Isaiah 65

❖ Daniel 7

## **Death**

❖ Isaiah 52-53

❖ Zechariah 9

## **Resurrection**

❖ Psalm 3

❖ 3<sup>rd</sup> day deliverance

## **Weekly Challenge**

*Continue memorizing the 100-word definition of the gospel provided in sessions 2 and 3, then continue revising your own 100-word definition (from Session #1 challenge) in light of what you've learned in sessions 2-4.*

## **Next Session**

*“Session 5: The Gospel the Apostles Preached.” In preparation, read Acts 2-3.*

## Session #5: The Gospel the Apostles Preached (Acts)

**Prayer and Opening Activity:** Read out loud the 100-word gospel together that we have set forward in previous sessions.

❖ Six Key Elements

1. Gospel is foreshadowed in OT prophecy
2. Jesus Christ was sent from God as the fulfillment of OT prophecy
3. Jesus Christ was crucified by sinful men
4. Jesus Christ is resurrected
5. Jesus Christ is exalted
6. Gospel message demands a response

❖ There are 8 gospel sermons in Acts (2:14-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:2-53; 10:34-43, with its retelling in 11:4-18; 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31)

	<i>Acts 2:14-39</i>	<i>Acts 3:12-26</i>	<i>Acts 4:8-12</i>	<i>Acts 13:16-41</i>	<i>Acts 17:22-31</i>
<i>Gospel is foreshadowed in OT prophecy</i>					
<i>Jesus Christ was sent from God as the fulfillment of OT prophecy</i>					
<i>Jesus Christ was crucified by sinful men</i>					
<i>Jesus Christ is resurrected</i>					
<i>Jesus Christ is exalted</i>					
<i>Gospel message demands a response</i>					

❖ What similarities do you see in the gospel sermons of the apostles?

❖ Which parts, phrases, and/or ideas are most repeated and/or emphasized?

- ❖ Scot McKnight claims “that if we ignore these passages, we will make two colossal mistakes: we will both fail to see *what* the gospel was and we will fail to see *how* the apostles gospeled.”<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Six points regarding the apostolic gospel<sup>2</sup>
  1. **Israel’s Story framed the gospel of the apostles**
    - “Peter and Paul framed their gospeled through the grid of Israel’s Story coming to its destination in the Story of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup>
  2. **The apostles declare the whole Story of Jesus as gospel**
    - The apostles’ “gospel involved telling the full Story of Jesus Christ, including his life, his death, his resurrection, his exaltation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, his second coming, and the wrapping up of history so that God would be all in all.”<sup>4</sup>
  3. **The apostles summed up the gospel in words about Jesus**
    - The apostles’ “Jesus of Nazareth, the one who lived and died and who was raised and ascended and enthroned, is both Messiah of Israel and Lord of the whole world.”<sup>5</sup>
    - “The apostolic gospel was framed in such a way that the story *was centered on and revolved around Jesus*. To gospel was (and is) to declare the royal truth about King Jesus. Jesus was (and is) the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>
  4. **The apostle Paul paves new ground by adapting the gospel to audience**
    - “But what we need to see here is that idol worship is a natural target for Paul’s gospel *because it concerned the godness of God and the lordship of King Jesus [...]* Regardless of his ability to adapt to context, that Gentile audience did not stop Paul from seeing the sweep of history through the scriptural Story of Israel that found its completion in the Story of Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>
  5. **The apostles summoned people to respond**
    - “To participate in the Story of Jesus the apostles called people *to believe, to repent, and to be baptized*.”<sup>8</sup>
  6. **The apostles promise redemption in a variety of terms**
    - Saved, forgiveness of sins, filled with the Holy Spirit, times of refreshing, justification, peace, etc.

## Weekly Challenge

*Read Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7. How does it match up with the other gospel sermons? What are the difference and similarities and why and how might the context make a difference? Share your reflections with a friend in the group.*

## Next Session

*“Session 6: The Gospel as Good News.” In preparation, consider how you would answer the question “What is news?”*

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 116.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 8 of McKnight’s *King Jesus Gospel*, especially pages 117-131.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 127.

## Session #6: The Gospel as Good News

**Prayer and Opening Activity:** What happened this week that reminded me that God is good?

### Opening Questions:

1. Last week's preparation included considering this week how to define news. What is news?
2. What is the difference between *good news* and *good advice*?

### Four Key Things About News (from N. T. Wright, *Simply Good News*, 3-4, 23)

1. Announcement of an event that has happened: *What has happened?*
2. Assumes a larger context, a new and unexpected development within a much longer story, in which this news now makes sense: *What is the larger context?*
3. This news is about something that has happened, because of which everything will now be different; sudden unveiling of a new future that lies ahead: *What is this new future?*
4. News introduces an intermediate period of waiting; transformation of the present moment, sitting between the event that has happened and the future that will happen: *What is this waiting period? What is it like? How ought we live in it?*

*"What good news regularly does, then, is to put a new event into an old story, point to a wonderful future hitherto out of reach, and so introduce a new period in which, instead of living a hopeless life, people are now waiting with excitement for what they know is on the way."*

*~N. T. Wright, Simply Good News, 4*

## Good News, Not Good Advice

- ❖ The point of advice is to make you do something to get a desired result
- ❖ Good advice often leads to us speaking of going to heaven instead of the good news that speaks of heaven coming to earth.
- ❖ “The good news is that *the one true God has now taken charge of the world, in and through Jesus and his death and resurrection*[...]The good news was, and is, that all this has happened in and through Jesus; that one day it *will* happen, completely and utterly, to all creation; *and that we humans, every single one of us, whoever we are, can be caught up in that transformation here and now.* This is the Christian gospel.” ~Wright, *Simply Good News*, 55

**Application question:** How should this change the way we talk about the gospel?

## Weekly Challenge

*Ask someone this week about the best news they ever received. What made it good? What did they do about it? Be prepared to answer if they ask you the same question in response.*

## Next Session

*“Session 7: The Gospel and the Cross.” In preparation, read the crucifixion accounts in at least two gospels and take note of their emphases.*



## Session #7: The Gospel and The Cross

1. Reminder of the Gospel
  - a. Story of Jesus as the resolution of the Story of Israel and the whole world
  - b. Four components: King and Kingdom (revisit in Session 9), Death (this session, 7), and Resurrection (revisit in session 8)
  - c. Biblical theology tells us there are two major problems with humanity
    - i. Sin
    - ii. Death, the wages of sin
  - d. The cross and the resurrection decisively deal with both
    - i. The cross: Victory over sin through the atonement
    - ii. The resurrection: Victory over death through new life
2. The Atonement
  - ❖ Basic definition
  - ❖ Why explore the atonement in a study on the gospel?
  - ❖ Proposed theories
    - Recapitulation
    - Ransom
    - Victory
    - Moral Influence
    - Exemplary
    - Satisfaction
    - Governmental
    - Penal Substitution
  - ❖ What are we to do with all these?
    - Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*
      - “I suggest that we think of atonement as *identification for incorporation*. I take Hebrews 2:14-18 to be thematic of the entire scope of the atonement” (107)
      - “Jesus *identifies* with humans: ‘he had to become like his brothers and sisters.’ Jesus *incorporates* humans in his destruction of death and the devil and liberates those held captive by being a faithful high priest for them (representing them before God as priests do).” (107)

- “Which means that Jesus died *for them, with them, and instead of them*: their death became his so that his life might become theirs.” (107)
  - Joshua McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement*
    - “My guiding metaphor suggests that various models of atonement may be viewed as oversized pieces of a Christ-shaped mosaic [...] Neither reductionism nor relativism; rather, reintegration. (22)
    - “There remains an order in the integration of atonement models, even though there is no need to prioritize one part of Christ’s mosaic body as most important. The recapitulative presuppositions of Irenaeus ground the other images like *feet* planted in the dust of fallen Eden. Christ’s penalty-bearing death pumps cleansing lifeblood like a *heart* to other members. And the triumphant *head* of *Christus Victor* rises as the telos of atonement, even as the final victory comes as the Spirit shapes sinners into saints by the beckoning and restraining *hands* of moral influence. ‘This is my body,’ Christ proclaimed, not merely broken but also mended for you.” (318)
3. Final thoughts and takeaways
- ❖ The atonement is closely related to the life of the church:
    - “This generation is tired of an old-fashioned atonement theology that does not make a difference, of an old-fashioned atonement theology that is for individual spiritual formation but not for ecclesial re-formation, and of an old-fashioned atonement theology that does not reconcile humans with humans.” ~McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 2
    - “*The gospel we preach shapes the kind of churches we create. The kind of church we have shapes the gospel we preach.*” ~McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 5
    - “[...] we will argue here that atonement is only understood when it is understood as the restoration of humans--in all directions--so that they form a society (the *ecclesia*, the church) wherein God’s will is lived out and given freedom to transform all of life. Any theory of atonement that is not an *ecclesial theory of the atonement* is inadequate” .” ~McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 9
  - ❖ The atonement impacts our life and mission:
    - “The atonement is designed by God to restore cracked Eikons into glory-producing Eikons by participation in the perfect Eikon, Jesus Christ, who redeems the cosmos. To be an Eikon, then, is to be charged with a theocentric *and* missional life.” ~McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 21
    - “To speak of atonement is to find oneself in a story. Atonement metaphors create a story with a *beginning* (created as Eikons) and an *end* (glorifying, fellowshiping Eikons), and they also put into that story a *conflict* (cracked Eikons as individuals and as groups) and a *resolution* (Eikons healed in all four directions: God, self, others, world).” ~McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 51

## Weekly Challenge

*Read through the Biblical Passages and take notes on the handout, then read the Sources of History. Reflect on how this deepens your understanding of the atonement and the gospel.*

## Next Session

*“Session 8: The Gospel and the Resurrection”. Read 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5 in preparation for next week.*

## Session #8: The Gospel and the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)

- ❖ Basic definition and context of the resurrection
  - Resurrection is not resuscitation, but rather a completely glorified existence
  - Jewish leaders (except Sadducees) believed in a resurrection of the faithful in the kingdom of God. But this belief was that ALL would be raised at the same time, not one person (Jesus) in advance of everyone else.
- ❖ Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection
  - Key facts
    1. Jesus of Nazareth was historical individual, attested by many sources
    2. Jesus of Nazareth was killed under the reign of Pontius Pilate
    3. The tomb was empty on Sunday morning
    4. Jesus appeared to both individuals and crowds for 40 days after His resurrection
    5. These witnesses were willing to die for their belief that Jesus was truly raised
  - Inference to the best explanation
    1. No other theory comes close to meeting the explanation of these facts by those who claim an historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus
    2. Other proposals fail to meet historical standards in several ways
      - i. Swoon Theory: Jesus didn't really die. *Response: Romans executed hundreds by crucifixion and knew how to ensure they were dead. Plus, Jesus' legs weren't broken because He was clearly already dead. Also, blood and water came out of His side when pierced with spear, proving He was dead.*
      - ii. Stolen Body Theory: Disciples stole Jesus' body and made up resurrection story. *Response: Cannot explain how the disciples would manage to steal a body from a centurion guarded tomb, or why they would die for their belief in His resurrection if they knew it was a hoax they had perpetrated.*
      - iii. Mass Hallucination Theory: People only thought they saw Jesus after His death because they hoped He was there (e.g., Elvis) but it was an hallucination. *Response: Can't explain the empty tomb, nor how so many people in so many places at so many times had the same experience, especially since they all stopped having it after Jesus ascended.*
- ❖ Meaning of Jesus' Resurrection and the Hope for Our Own
  - In light of 1 Corinthians 15, there are five things we must insist on about the resurrection (Wright in The Challenge of Easter).
    1. It was the moment when the creator God fulfilled his ancient promises to Israel, saving them from 'their sins', their exile. It thus initiated the 'last days,' at the end of which the victory over death begun at Easter would at last be complete.
    2. It involved the transformation of Jesus' body: it was, that is to say, neither a resuscitation of Jesus' body to the same sort of life nor an abandonment of that body to decomposition. Paul's account presupposes the empty tomb.
    3. It involved Jesus' being seen alive in a very limited early period, after which he was known as present to the church in a different way. These early sightings constituted those who witnessed them as apostles.
    4. It was the prototype for the resurrection of all God's people at the end of the last days.
    5. It was thus the ground not only for the future hope of Christians but for their present work.

- Some implications of 1 Cor 15 (Richard Hays)
  1. The resurrection of the dead is necessary in order to hold creation and redemption together
  2. In a culture that evades telling the truth about death, the teaching of the resurrection comes as a blast of fresh air
  3. The doctrine of resurrection of the dead affirms the moral significance of life in the body
  4. The moral action to which the resurrection calls us may put us at odds with the established powers in our society
  5. The resurrection binds us to Israel
  6. All Christian proclamation must be grounded in the resurrection
  7. The resurrection calls for conversion of the imagination

#### ❖ Application

1. Live in present and future victory
2. Good news is rooted in the resurrection, and makes no sense without the resurrection
  - ❖ If Jesus is not raised, then he is simply another failed Messiah, not the resolution to Israel's story, and his preaching of the gospel is in vain, for as we have already seen, that was the content of his gospel (v. 14)
  - ❖ If Jesus is not raised, then God and the apostles are liars (v. 15), for they testified that Jesus was raised, which he is not if the dead are not raised.
  - ❖ If Jesus is not raised, you are still in your sins (v. 17). Why? St. Anselm of Canterbury once said that only a man ought to make atonement for sin since man is the one who sinned, but only God could make atonement for sin. Therefore, we needed a God-man to do it. If Jesus is not raised, then he was not the God-man that he claimed to be. And if he was not the God-man he claimed to be, then you are still in your sins for his death could not pay the ransom for our sins.
  - ❖ If Jesus is not raised, no one will be raised, so those who have died are not asleep, but dead. This life is all we have, and that makes us most to be pitied, for we have wasted our lives (v. 18-19)
  - ❖ The Gospel, then, is the story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of Israel. As NT Wright says: "We have seen over and over again that he is trying to get the Corinthians to understand where they are, and who they are, in God's long story. They are in danger of forgetting their roots—the roots which they have because they belong to the Messiah, who has brought Israel's long story to its climax. They have to learn to live 'according to the scriptures': not in the sense that they must take little bits and pieces of the Bible as their guide to life but in the much larger sense that the whole Bible tells a story which has now exploded into new life with the Messiah, particularly with his death and resurrection"
3. Good news is both present and future
  - ❖ Victory over sin (and sinning)
  - ❖ Victory over death

### Weekly Challenge

*Consider how this could change the way that you approach Easter Sunday. Prayerfully seek God's wisdom on ways that you can live in light of this resurrection hope.*

### Next Session

*"Session 9: The Kingdom Gospel". In preparation for next week, write out ways you can think of that the gospel matches with the biblical theme of "kingdom".*

## Session #9: The Kingdom Gospel

We talked in Session #7 about the atonement because it is an important way in which we can help explain *how* Jesus' death can save us from our sins, our position before God as enemies, and our resulting just condemnation. But N.T. Wright is correct to note that "it doesn't look as though the gospels really make 'atonement,' *in the sense the church has come to use that word*, their main theme."<sup>9</sup> Instead, Wright argues that "all four canonical gospels suppose themselves to be telling the story that Paul, in some of his most central and characteristic passages, tells as well: that *the story of Jesus is the story of how Israel's God became king*."<sup>10</sup>

Using the analogy of speakers, he discusses four ways that the sound of the gospels have been distorted, sometimes because the truth is too silent, and other times because something has been turned up too loud (sometimes true points out of focus, other times points that are misunderstood).

1. The four gospels present themselves as the climax of the story of Israel (ch. 4)
2. The four gospels present the story of Jesus as the story of Israel's God coming back to his people as he always promised (ch. 5)
3. The four gospels present themselves as deliberately composed foundational documents for the new movement, not merely the story of the early Christian faith (ch. 6)
4. The four gospels present the story of Jesus as the story of the kingdom of God clashing with the kingdom of Caesar (ch. 7)

Consider also how the decisive event of human history (the death and resurrection of Jesus) is identified in the gospels as a struggle of kingdoms. First, Pilate questions Jesus about truth and his kingship. Jesus responds with claims that Pilate's (in place of Caesar) authority is given by another: namely, the God of Israel. Second, the Jewish leaders finally convince Pilate (who has repeatedly said he has found no guilt in Jesus) to deliver him to death when they say that anyone who makes himself a king is a threat to Caesar. Being implicated in Jesus' kingdom movement instead of obeying Caesar's pushes Pilate over the edge. Third, in crucifying Jesus, Pilate writes above his head: the king of the Jews. The Jewish leaders want him to change the title to "this man said he was the king of the Jews," but Pilate replies that he has said what he has said. Thus, this exchange and subsequent crucifixion (John 18-19) tell the decisive event of human history not in terms of the atonement (although that is not denied here) but in terms of kingship.

Finally, we could address the fact that such a large amount of Jesus' teaching is about the kingdom of God. In his Sermon on the Mount, he brackets his Beatitudes with the blessing of the kingdom of God. Then he teaches his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come and his will would be done on earth as in heaven. Later he says to seek first the kingdom of God. Then Jesus' parables (of which there are many) are almost all about the kingdom of God. Jesus' teaching, like his death, is centered on the kingdom.

All these reflections lead Wright to some important conclusions, but perhaps none more so than the following: "[...]the four gospels leave us with the primary application of the cross not in abstract preaching about 'how to have your sins forgiven' or 'how to go to heaven,' but in an agenda in which the forgiven people are put to work, addressing the evils of the world in light of the victory of Calvary."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 7.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 244.

Scot McKnight, in his excellent work *The King Jesus Gospel*, takes a different approach to the topic but ends up in the same place. For McKnight, “The Story of Jesus [...] is first and foremost a resolution of Israel’s Story and because the Jesus Story completes Israel’s Story, it saves.”<sup>12</sup> McKnight challenges the “salvation culture” or “salvation only” gospels that make the gospel merely an “in and out” issue of salvation.<sup>13</sup> Rather, “in this book we want to show that the gospel of Jesus and that of the apostles, both of which created a *gospel* culture and not simply a salvation culture, was a gospel that carried within it the power, the capacity, and the requirement to summon people who wanted to be ‘in’ to be The Discipled. In other words, it swallowed up a salvation culture into a gospel culture.”<sup>14</sup> In summarizing McKnight’s work in the preface, Wright comments: “‘The gospel’ is the story of Jesus of Nazareth told as the climax of the long story of Israel, which in turn is the story of how the one true God is rescuing the world.”<sup>15</sup> McKnight, like Wright, argues that the gospel is about Jesus’ kingship, which is rooted in the story of God’s plan to redeem all nations through Israel’s messiah. When we remove the kingship of Jesus from our gospel, we cease to remember the role of the Old Testament and the gospels themselves in shaping the biblical preaching of the gospel.

In a subsequent work, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, McKnight builds upon his claims regarding the gospel in *The King Jesus Gospel* and explores more about the meaning of the kingdom and how we, as disciples of the king, are to live as kingdom people. Contrary to those who see the kingdom as merely spiritual, and contrary to those who think unbelievers are doing “kingdom work” through good deeds, McKnight argues that Christians do kingdom work in and through the church. His conclusion provides a helpful survey of fifteen theses that summarize his points in the book. I highly recommend the whole book (as well as theses 1-13), but the final two serve as a great summary of the whole book. McKnight writes:

14. Kingdom mission, then, is local church mission.

- Evangelism
- Worship
- Catechesis: wisdom
- Fellowship: love
- Edification: advocacy
- Discipleship: nurture
- Gifts: Spirit unleashed

15. The only place kingdom work is and can be done is in the and through the local church when disciples (kingdom citizens, church people) are doing kingdom mission.<sup>16</sup>

## Weekly Challenge

*Ask some church members and/or friends how they define the kingdom of God and what it means to them that Jesus is king. Look for similarities and differences, as well as finding points of contact with this week’s session.*

## Next Session

“Session 10: Allegiance, the Response to the Gospel”. In preparation, read Romans 1:1-5, 10:1-13, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, and Philippians 2:5-11. Note similarities among these passages.

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<sup>12</sup>Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 37.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>16</sup>Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 208.

## Session #10: Allegiance, the Response to the Gospel

**Prayer and Opening Activity:** What happened this week that reminded me that God is good?

### Opening Questions

1. How do we typically tell people to respond to the gospel?
2. How do we typically use the word allegiance? In what contexts? What do we mean? How do we enact allegiance?

### Summarizing the Gospel

In our first nine sessions we have explored the content of the gospel, exploring it through various lenses (e.g., Jesus, Paul, Apostles, Old Testament, etc.). Our conclusions have been summarized in our 100-word definition of the gospel:

*The gospel is the story of Jesus as the resolution of the story of Israel and the whole world. God created mankind in His image to share in relationship with Him, yet we have rebelled against God and separated ourselves from Him. Yet God promised to send a redeemer who would be king and establish God's kingdom. After years of waiting, Jesus finally arrives to fulfill God's promise—Jesus, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, is shown to be both Lord and king of the whole world through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father!*

Matthew Bates, in his excellent book *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, notes eight summative points of the gospel that closely correlate to our definition.<sup>17</sup> In his follow-up book, *Gospel Allegiance*, he clarifies a couple points and proposes a ten-point outline. He writes:

The gospel is that Jesus the king

1. preexisted as God the son,
2. was sent by the Father,
3. took on human flesh in fulfillment of God's promises to David,
4. died for sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
5. was buried,
6. was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
7. appeared to many witnesses,
8. is enthroned at the right hand of God as the ruling Christ,
9. has sent the Holy Spirit to his people to effect his rule, and
10. will come again as final judge to rule.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 52, 74, 93.

<sup>18</sup>Matthew W. Bates, *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), 86-87.

Our most common teaching on responding to the gospel is to have faith. But what does it mean to have faith? Mere intellectual assent? Assent to what? James says even the demons believe, so how is faith different than belief? These are questions we don't always (or often) take the time to consider, but they are of vital importance. What can be more important than getting the gospel and the proper response right?! In the New Testament, the most common word in contexts of general "salvation" passages is *pistis*, usually translated as faith. But Matthew Bates has argued convincingly that the meaning of *pistis* is broader than we typically allow. So what might this teach us about *pistis* as the proper response to the gospel?

### **What is Faith (*pistis*)?**

What ***Pistis*** Is Not.

1. Not opposite of evidence assessment
2. Not leap in the dark
3. Not opposite of works
4. Not an "it's all good" attitude
5. Not reducible to intellectual assent
6. Not part of the gospel, but rather the fitting response to the gospel

What ***Pistis*** Is.

1. Jesus' own allegiance to God the Father that ultimately led to His enthronement
2. Our own allegiance-yielding response to Jesus as the King

### **Weekly Challenge**

Spend some time thinking about how you typically conceive of faith. Then read Romans 1 (esp. vv. 1-17) and replace the word *faith* with *allegiance*. How does this change the way you view Paul's purpose in this letter? If you have time, read the rest of Romans doing the same thing and journal about where *allegiance* makes more or less sense than *faith*.

### **Next Session**

"Session 11: Sharing the Gospel and Creating a Gospel Culture". In preparation, read Acts 2-4, 17.



## **Session #11: Sharing the Gospel and Creating a Gospel Culture**

**Prayer and Opening Activity:** What are three takeaways you have from this study?

### **Sharing the Gospel**

- ❖ What challenges do I face in sharing the gospel?
  
- ❖ How can I learn to overcome these challenges?
  
- ❖ How should we share the gospel?
  - Content
    1. The gospel is a story, not merely a collection of facts
  
    2. The gospel is Jesus' story
  
    3. The gospel is Jesus' story as the resolution of Israel's story
  
    4. The gospel is Jesus' story as the resolution of the world's story
  
    5. The gospel is the story of Jesus becoming king of all nations
  
    6. The gospel becomes "our story" when we are in Christ by allegiance
  - Method
    1. Tell the story
  
    2. Call people to repentance and allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and King

### **Creating a Gospel Culture**

- ❖ How healthy is the gospel culture in my current context? Explain.

❖ How do we create a gospel culture? (From McKnight's *The King Jesus Gospel*, ch. 10)

1. People of the Story: *We have to become People of the Story.*
2. People of the Story of Jesus: *We need to immerse ourselves even more into the Story of Jesus.*
3. People of the Church's Story: *We need to see how the apostles' writings take the Story of Israel and the Story of Jesus into the next generation and into a different culture, and how this generation led all the way to our generation.*
4. Developing Counter Stories: *We need to counter the stories that bracket out story and that reframe our story.*
5. Embrace the Story: *We need to embrace this story so that we are saved and can be transformed by the gospel story.*

### **Weekly Challenge:**

Make a decision on your next step. Write it down and share that commitment with someone else who will keep you accountable to take that step.

*Possible Next Steps*

- ☐ Repent and follow Jesus
- ☐ Be baptized
- ☐ Disciple someone else
- ☐ Lead your own small group, whether prayer or Bible study
- ☐ Get involved in a local church

My next step is: \_\_\_\_\_

*Congratulations on completing the 11-session "What is the Gospel? Discipleship Study". I trust that your time in God's Word and in this group has changed you. I pray that you better understand who Jesus is, what the gospel and discipleship are, and you are committed to becoming a disciple-maker. May the Father grant you peace and eternal life in Christ and fellowship with Him through the Holy Spirit as you continue on this journey of faith and discipleship.*

*In Christ,*

*Kyle Rapinchuk*