

The Good News

Josh Patterson – February 1, 2015

Good morning. Are you guys doing all right? Good, good, good. I'm excited to be here, eager to work through some things together this morning. My name is Josh Patterson. I serve as one of the pastors here on staff at The Village. As you know, this past month, the month of January, in the life of our church, is always a month of prayer. We have been praying and considering three specific topics, three specific burdens in the life of our church.

We've pressed into, prayed about, preached over racial reconciliation. We've talked about the nations, and we've talked about the sanctity of human life. As I've kind of looked over this past month and considered it myself and received the messages and been convicted and felt the weight and sometimes the sting of gospel good conviction in my heart and in my life, there were a couple of things I thought would be helpful for us to reconsider again this morning.

Now, there has been plenty of this all throughout the month, but what I wanted to do was set aside and say this to us as a church. What we have been looking at in the month of January have been gospel issues. They're good issues, and they're weighty issues, and they're issues we need to look at. We cannot become a church that confuses gospel issues with the gospel. There is a difference between gospel issues and gospel implications and the gospel itself.

All these things we've looked at have been implications of the gospel or a command to take the gospel to the nations, but the gospel, the essence of the message is not the things we've been talking about. It's an implication of this good gospel message. What I want to do is just begin to hold up for us this morning the gospel and ask the question, "What is the gospel? What is the essence of it?"

The picture I just consider is this. The gospel sits at the center of a wheel. It's like the hub that sits right there at the center. There are a thousand spokes that come off of it. They go in a myriad of directions, and they're all different implications of the gospel, but at the center, at the hub is the person and the work of Jesus Christ.

You think about it like this. You think about a heart that beats within you. That heart is pumping blood all throughout the body, and it's coursing all throughout the veins, and it's going in a bunch of different directions, but the heart is different than the arteries. The arteries are taking blood away and out from the heart. It's like the gospel implications, but the heart itself is different.

I want to look at the heart of the gospel together this morning, and I want to start by asking a simple question, but it's profound. Here's the question I want to start with. *Why are you here this morning?* Why are you here? Some of you may be asking yourself, "Why am I here when I walked out and realized it wasn't Chandler?" I get that. That's not what I'm talking about.

I'm asking it like this, more in the existential, the big questions of life kind of thing. Why are you here? Why am I here? What's the point? Why is there something instead of nothing? Why were we created? What is the meaning of life? Why is there this thing called existence? Why do you matter if you do at all? Why do I matter? Why are you here?

Philosophers have debated this, and people have talked about this literally since the beginning of time. By God's grace, the Word of God speaks to this as well, but it speaks to it in a couple of different ways. What I want to look at today are two different contrasting understandings of why you and I are here.

There is a catechism, the Westminster Catechism, which is a collection of teaching that the church has put together, the church from ages ago. The Catechism asks this question. "What is the chief end of man?" To say it another way, "What is the point? Why are we here? Why have we been created? What is our purpose?"

It answers that by saying, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." If you look at the Scriptures and look at the understanding of what God has declared to be your purpose and my purpose, it is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. John Piper nuances it this way, to glorify God *by* enjoying him forever, to link God's glory and our joy together.

You and I were created for a purpose, and that purpose was to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Listen to what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 1:1. He says, "**The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is**

vanity." Another translation, the NIV, writes it like this. "Meaningless! Meaningless! Life is utterly meaningless!"

How awesome is that? Sunday morning, 9:20, and you just walk in, and here is the good news for you. Your life doesn't matter. That's what Solomon is saying. Here's what is crazy about the book of Ecclesiastes. It's a depressing book. What Solomon is going to do is, right out of the gate, he is going to set up this summary statement. "Chase what you want to chase. Pursue what you want to pursue. Get your thirst quenched out of this well, and it will come up dry every time."

He's going to walk through a variety of different pursuits. He's going to talk about wealth. He's going to talk fame, fortune, sex, power, prestige, and he's going to say, "It doesn't matter. Work, labor, friends, family... In the end, it's all vain. In the end, it's all meaningless." He's going to talk about a variety of reasons why it's vain and why it's meaningless, but it can all be summed up with this. In the end, you die. That's why.

You can have all the fame and fortune in the world. King Solomon did, and he's going to say, "In the end, it doesn't matter because I'm going to die." It levels the playing field for the rich and the poor because we all experience this same thing together called death. He's going to talk about the pursuit of pleasure, and Solomon certainly pursued pleasure in a variety of forms. Solomon is going to say, "It doesn't add up. It isn't what it's cracked up to be. In the end, it's vain. In the end, it's meaningless. In the end, it doesn't matter."

Think about this pronouncement over your life and over my life. No matter what you pursue, no matter what you chase, no matter what you go after, no matter how you try to quench the thirst of your soul, it will not happen. This is coming from a guy who has more, experienced more, had the opportunity to do more things than you and I ever will. Solomon says, "It simply is vain and meaningless."

You and I were created for a purpose. That purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Solomon is saying, "Chase what you want to chase. You'll never catch it." At the end of the book... Literally, that's the first verse. The last verse of the book says, "**The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.**"

He said, "When it's all said and done, after this pursuit and this pursuit and this pursuit, when it's all said and done, this is the end for which humanity was created, to fear God and to keep his

commandments." How do you get from here to there? What is happening there? If you read the book, what Solomon says is life can be divided into two categories. One category is life underneath the sun, and the other category is life beyond the sun.

The category of life underneath the sun is the category of vain pursuits. Solomon is going to say, "You can chase this. You can chase that. Fame, fortune, money, sex, power, prestige... So long as it's underneath the sun, you will never get it. It will always be vain, always be meaningless." Then at the end, Solomon is going to say, "If you can get beyond the sun, if you can get to this other plane, then life takes on a different flavor. It takes on a different meaning. It takes on a different substance and significance."

Look at what the apostle Paul says about it in 1 Corinthians 10:31. This is radical. Paul writes, "**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.**" Note the contrast here. Solomon talks about kingdoms and power and wealth and fame and fortune and prestige and all of this. He says, "It doesn't matter." Then Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, you do it all for the glory of God."

Solomon, no significance. Paul, absolute significance. Solomon, purposelessness. Paul, the very purpose by which you were created to do. In Paul, the very mundane act of eating and drinking which you do day in and day out... He says a glass of orange juice, what you have in your hand this morning, as you sip your coffee, that can be done for the glory of God. Solomon says, "You can rule over kingdoms, and in the end, it means nothing."

See, the contrast here is Paul is describing life beyond the sun. To say it another way, he describes it like this. Life in Christ takes on absolute meaning. Solomon is describing life without Christ, which has no meaning. A life joined with and in union with God takes on the uttermost significance, but a life without him has zero significance.

You and I were created for a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify God. Solomon is going to say you can chase purpose your whole life, and you'll never get it so long as you are not connected to the Savior. Paul is going to say, "If you are in union with him, then literally anything and everything you do has eternal purpose." Just feel the difference there. Feel the pronouncement over your life and my life.

Apart from Christ is where Solomon is spending some time. Apart from him, consider the predicament that your life's pursuits, my life's pursuits... It doesn't matter which direction we go, what we chase, or what we're after. It doesn't matter. Surely, you've had that moment, that sense of experience where you maybe have achieved something.

You've had a goal listed out. You've run the marathon or the half marathon. You did the triathlon. You graduated from college. You got the degree. You got into law school. You got this job or that. You finally did it. You won the big game. Right? You've had that moment just kind of nod at you. Whether you let anybody into it or not is different.

That moment where you realized, "Surely there is more than this. This isn't satisfying at the level which I had hoped, maybe I had banked on, maybe I had wished for." What Solomon is just kind of putting on display is, "Yes. You can do that a thousand times over, and it's always going to come up the same way." The question you and I have to ask regarding our purpose and why we cannot fulfill it is, "What is the problem?"

If you and I were created for this grand and glorious purpose, but you and I can never get there, can never achieve it, can never be satisfied, why? What's the problem? What's the issue? The Bible is going to distill the answer to that question down to one little word of three little letters: *sin*. Yeah, you and I were created for a purpose. You and I were created to enjoy God and to glorify him with our lives, but we don't. More than that, we can't.

Why don't we, and why can't we? The Bible is going to answer that question by saying you and I can't and won't and don't because of sin. What is sin? What is the nature of sin? We have to begin to ask these questions to try to get to the bottom of this situation. Consider what is at stake. Your joy and your purpose and your significance and your life are at stake here. The Bible is going to say that sin is a major issue, in fact, *the* major issue.

What is sin? The apostle John defines it like this in 1 John 3. He says, "**Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.**" It's a crime. It's a crime against a holy and righteous God. Consider this. The Creator God who created you and created me is holy and just and other than. He is righteous and good and true and beautiful, which is not descriptive of you and me.

This good, true, beautiful, holy, righteous Creator God creates you and creates me, but sin enters the picture. We read about that in Genesis 3. Sin enters the conversation, and it absolutely destroys everything. Sin is an act of lawlessness. It's an act of insubordination. It's a crime. It's an offense against a good, holy, and righteous God. It's finding satisfaction in anything other than the God who created you to find satisfaction and joy in him.

We've answered the question, "What is sin?" Let's talk about, "What's the big deal with it? Yeah, we have a holy and righteous God. My life I guess is okay. I'm struggling here, and I'm struggling there, but I'm not like this guy or like that gal or whatever." The Bible is going to continue just to kind of lay pronouncements over you and over me.

What is the penalty for sin? The Bible is going to say this in Romans 6 and in other places. **"For the wages of sin is death..."** We'll get to this, **"...but the free gift..."** in a second. **"For the wages of sin is death..."** Consider this. Sin seems to be an issue you and I have or struggle with. We'll talk about this more and unpack it here as we go.

What is the penalty for this sin? What's the penalty for this lawlessness or this insubordination? What's the penalty for this crime? How is it to be atoned for? What is to happen with this? The Bible is going to say this about sin, that sin, the wages, what sin has earned you and me is death. What kind of death? Both a spiritual death and a physical death.

The physical death you and I experience as we lose loved ones, as we lose friends and family and relatives and read about things happening in the news or stories we see as people are dying, people are dying because sin has entered into the conversation, because sin is in the world. That's where death came from. Death came as a penalty for sin. Such is the physical death.

It's the spiritual death. There is a spiritual death that occurs inside of me and inside of you, a spiritual separation from the very God we were connected to and created by. There is physical separation. There is spiritual separation. There is physical death. There is spiritual death, but... It just starts to pile on, but death doesn't end it. Death just catapults us into something called eternity.

That eternity is stored up and set apart as a place where God says he will forever punish sin in a place called hell, a real place called hell. God will forever and eternally, rightfully and justly punish sin. We don't talk about that enough. We don't feel that like we probably should. It maybe just kind

of makes us real uncomfortable. It's certainly not politically correct. This is what the Word of God is teaching and saying and pronouncing over humanity.

We better feel this. We better know this. Consider where we are, where we stand in this moment. You and I were created for a purpose. That purpose is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The Bible is going to say you and I will never achieve that purpose. We can never achieve it. What we're destined to is a life that is purposelessness. It's a life of purposelessness. We will run this way and flutter about that way. We will try this and long for that, but it will never satisfy.

We're drinking sand and keep going to wells that are empty. For some of us, we'll just keep achieving and keep going and keep trying and running and running and running, ignoring the fact that we're on a treadmill and really going nowhere. We'll try to make more. We'll try to earn more. We'll try to achieve more. We'll try to get a bunch of plaques on the wall and medals all over us and say, "Look! Look! Look! Don't I matter? Doesn't my life count for something?" Right? "I have to keep going. I have to keep pressing."

Some of us are just going to punt. We're just going to say, "Forget it. It's too much." Just despairing. You've had an honest conversation with your own heart, and you've just given up because you realized it doesn't matter, and you don't either. It gets worse. It's not just purposelessness. There's a penalty. There's a penalty for this sin. The penalty for this sin is death, but beyond the penalty of death is eternal punishment. Do you start to feel this yet?

If you're like me, what do I do? How do I get out of this? How can I change this? This is where it gets even crazier because the next question we want to deal with around this is, "Where is sin? Is it what I'm doing? Do I just need to change some things, change my speech? Do I need to help more people, give more money away, start doing good deeds, volunteer at the local charity, help old ladies across the street, save cats from trees? Will this do it? Will this change my lot in life? What do I do? Where do I go?"

Let's roll with what the Bible says in Ephesians 2:1. **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."**

You see, by nature, we were children of wrath. Now, like a straightjacket, it doesn't seem like there's room to get anywhere. You can't quite get out when you realize this reality of what the Bible is teaching. The Bible is teaching that sin isn't what you do; sin is who you are. The reason you and I sin is because we're sinners. We're not sinners because we sin.

That absolutely is the nail in the coffin because you can't change you, and I can't change me. I can't get it out of me. I can't wash it off. I can't change clothes. I can't just try to conform to a different pattern of speech or do this or do that differently. There is nowhere to go because where I go, guess who's there. Me. Do you know who the problem is? Me. Do you know where the problem is? Inside of me.

When I was about 8 or 9 years old, my family was at a hotel. It's kind of a weird memory I have. We were at this hotel, and there was an indoor pool. They had taken the pool cover and rolled it up and put it on the edge of the pool, but a portion of it was kind of hanging over the edge of the pool. I thought, "This would be a great challenge, to see if I can line up on this side of the pool and swim underneath that pool cover all the way down to the other end.

I get to the end and take a deep breath and go under, push off, and begin to swim. I feel like I'm doing well, and then I realize I'm not going to make it, so I need to come up for breath. When I go to come up for breath, I hit the tarp. I couldn't get it up, couldn't move it. I just start to begin to panic. I go back under and swim a little bit more. I do the same thing where I hit it again. Now I'm panicking more because I'm desperately needing breath, but I don't know what to do, and I don't think I can make it to the end.

Where the Bible leaves us right now is somewhat like that. You should have in your gut, in your soul, this sense of, "I need some air here. I need some help here. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to get out of this mess or how I'm going to get out of this situation because this sin and this purpose for which I was created I'm not achieving. There is a problem that is pronounced over me, and I can't get rid of it. I don't know where to go. I can't get out, and I feel like I'm suffocating. I need air."

There's a theologian who was a Puritan pastor who said this. "Until sin becomes bitter, Christ will never be sweet." All I have laid out for you at this point is really, really, really bad news. You should feel that. It should feel suffocating like you're in a straightjacket, and you can't get out, and you desperately want to, but you can't do it.

You are powerless like I am. We should feel that. We should feel the sting and the weight and the significance of eternal punishment and death and separation from a good, holy, and righteous God. You should feel the fact that you can't change it. You can't earn or achieve your way out. You should feel and I should feel how despairing of a situation this is. Until the bad news becomes bad, there is no good news.

If there's no joy in your Christian life, if there's no response in worship, a longing to take Communion with the saints, a movement toward these things, if there is not a desire to gather together and encourage and edify one another and open the Word and receive from the God who created you, maybe it's because you have never truly felt the weight of the predicament that you and I were in because you don't need rescue.

For those of you who are underneath the tarp, longing for breath with seemingly no hope and not quite sure where to go or how to get it, if somebody jumps in that pool and pulls you out, it's different, right? You're longing for rescue, and when that rescuer comes, when that provision is made, when that solution and that savior to the problem comes and redeems and rescues and reconciles, then...

In Ephesians 2, we read that. Verse 4 starts, **"But God..."** Come on, church. **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us..."** He sent his Son. He jumped in the water. He rescued our sorry, pitiful states. We have this purpose, and we have this problem, but there is provision. He does not leave us alone in our destitute and despairing state. He does not leave us stuck in the situation of helplessness and hopelessness.

He is a good, loving, and gracious God, and that good, loving, and gracious God provides a marvelous and magnificent Savior, his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It says in 1 Corinthians 15, **"Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance..."**

This is primary. This is the heart that pulses. This is the hub of the spoke. This is the center of the wheel. This is of first importance. Paul says, "I received this. I didn't make this up. Here it is." **"...that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..."** This is the gospel. This is the center. This is the heart. This is the essence of the good news.

It has been really, really, really bad at this point, but God graciously steps in, and it says this. "Christ died for our sins and was raised." I'm going to go to fifth gear here, and y'all are going to go with me. Christ died for our sins, and he was raised. What this means, church... When the Bible talks about Christ... There are a thousand different books and a hundred different definitions and people concocting and conceiving this idea. Let me tell you who the Christ Paul is describing here is.

It's the Christ of the Bible, the second person of the Trinity, the one who always has been and is eternal with the Father, the one who is the active agent in creating the world and sustains the world, and the world was created for him and by him and holds together because of him, and it's all through him and to him and for his glory. This is the Christ who died. This Christ is the one who came and died for our sins.

This Christ was also born of the Virgin Mary, a little baby. This little baby grew up and did miracle after miracle after miracle and spoke teachings and pronounced the kingdom and talked about the good news of his arrival. He came on a mission. This is the Christ who fed the 5,000, gave sight to the blind, who let the little children come and sit around him. It's this Christ of the Bible who was suffered under Pontius Pilate, mocked, beaten, scorned, rejected, ridiculed.

This is the Christ who goes to that cross unjustly because of the mission. Why? Because Christ died for our sins. As he hung on that cross and as he bled and as he died, the Scripture says he died for our sins, in our place condemned. He stood so he takes our punishment, our penalty, our scorn, our shame. All of it is heaped upon him, and he sits on that cross and hangs there as a propitiation or wrath absorber.

All of that punishment that was meant for you and for me is directed at him. It's laid upon him because he's the only one, the only sufficient sacrifice, the only one who could absorb it, who could receive it, who could pay the penalty. It was him, and he does it. Why? For our sins. Do you know what he says? He says, "It is finished. It's done. I'm hanging here, and it's done."

The reason he could say it's done and that it's finished, and he declares that reality is because it was true. He was the last good final and sufficient sacrifice. It was finished. Why? It says Christ died for our sins and was raised. Hello, church. He was raised. He raised up from the dead. He didn't stay dead. He rose. In that resurrection, two things happened. One is a validation as it points backward that he was indeed the Christ. He was indeed the one who could save the world from their sins.

He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah. "It points backward to all those things I did. All of that was pointing to this moment, and I'm saying it's finished. Why? I just rose from the dead." It's not just validation that points backward. It's victory that points forward. What victory did Christ just purchase on the cross? He purchased this victory on the cross, victory over sin, victory over death, victory over hell. Christ has victory over that.

He says this to you and to me. That victory which is his victory he gives to his people. It's now your victory. You have been victorious through Christ over sin, death, and the grave. Do you get this? Do you feel this? Does this do something in us? Does it well up in us? That victory means this for you and for me. It means we can lay our lives down. It means we can let it all go, give it all up.

We can move overseas. We can take the gospel to the nations. Why? This life is not all there is. Christ says, "I'm the firstborn of the resurrection. You too will rise, and you'll rise with me in eternal joy and eternal glory, and there will not be one single ounce of regret for all you have gone through, the hardships and the suffering and the laying down of your life in this life. Why? There is a life called eternal that I have given and won for you."

Last weekend was a waiting message around the sanctity of life, and I know I know because I've had the conversations, and I know the statistics. There are a bunch of people in our church who have either had an abortion or paid for an abortion, encouraged someone toward that. Last week... You may have felt the weight of guilt and shame as lies began to come up and speak into your ears, but this is what the gospel says to you. If you are in Christ, it is finished. It's done. You are forgiven.

You come out of that shame. You come out of that darkness. You walk in marvelous light. Why? You're a daughter of the King. You have been ransomed and redeemed. You're covered. Why? You're a child of God. You're a son of the King, forgiven. For those of us in here who are filled with apathy, who just simply don't care about racial reconciliation or don't ever really consider the call to the nations, God has even forgiven us in our apathy, in our self-righteous justifications, in our self-sufficiencies, in our longing for comforts here in this area of life.

God even declares over us, "Child, you're forgiven." The gospel message... He says, "It's finished. You're mine. I've got you. It's done. It's finished." That's how the good news becomes grand and glorious and amazing and beautiful in light of the really horrible bad news. Does this gospel then not kind of push us and propel us out to chase after these gospel implications?

The things we have been pressing in and praying about all month take on a different significance when you and I consider our lot and God's good and gracious provision, that he died for people who don't look like us, that he died for people who are dirty and live shameful lives and did horrific acts. He died for them just like he did for you.

Does it not propel us to move forward in compassion and hold up a sign that just simply says, "Grace. This is what he has for us. Grace. This is what he has for the church. Grace. This is what he has for the world. Grace." Is that not good news? Is that not good news? How do we respond? Where do we go? What do we do today with the rest of our time? Here's how I want to end my time with you as I pass it on to Bleeker.

There are some in here who simply don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are honored and thrilled that you would be here. I know some of you came for a variety of reasons. Some of you are not quite sure why you're here. All we have just talked about... The bad news sits over your life, and it's bad, but here's the amazing news. The invitation God gives to you right now, literally the invitation of God to you...

Listen to what Romans 10 says. **"...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead..."** Hear this. **"...you will be saved."** That's true for you right now. **"...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."**

Our hope and our prayer is that you would receive the grace of God that is being extended to you from him even now. For those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who at some point in our lives have received that gracious invitation from God himself, what is our response? Our response is to respond to him for who he is and what he has done in worship.

We're going to do that in a couple of ways this morning. We're going to first take Communion. If you're handing out the elements, if you could go ahead and stand up and begin to pass those out. I'm going to set up Communion for us. Communion is a meal the church has been enjoying since the night of Jesus' betrayal. It was a meal in which his disciples were gathered.

Jesus says some things to them about his mission and what he came to do. Basically, he says, "My body is going to be broken for you. My blood is going to be shed for you." If you're a guest with us

joining us in good standing from another church, we would be delighted for you to join us in this meal. If you're not a believer, we would just ask that you let it pass, but consider the invitation of grace that God is extending to you even right now.

Church, when you receive the elements, I'm going to ask that you just hold onto them. We're going to take them together. I ask that you would use the time as the elements are being passed out to simply reflect. As you hold the cracker and the juice, that you would reflect on really how sorry of a state we were in, how dire the situation and the circumstances were, and consider the body of Christ that was broken for you and the blood of Christ that was shed for you.

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