

Title: God's Good News

Text: John 20:31

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The word "gospel" is at the heart of the Christian religion. It is one that simply means "good news." Though the word is often spoken of amongst Christians, it should never become too common place. It shouldn't be regarded as a mere entry point to Christianity either, as the gospel is the means and mechanism by which God's people consistently relate to God. Even in the Eternal State, it will be the gospel that makes fellowship with God possible.

God's people must have eyes of faith that stay fixed on the gospel. However, in staying focused on such things, it is important to remember that the gospel is more than a mere message. It is not primarily a paradigm of principles or precepts. It isn't an arrangement of mere ideas. Instead, the gospel is a message about a person!

A Massive, Perfect Diamond

Jesus is the heart of the gospel. It is His life and work that brings good news to humanity. Though men, women, boys, and girls are naturally estranged from God because of sin, Christ's life and death brings people back into a right relationship with God. Those who want to experience God's good news should look no further than Jesus. He is the God-Man who brings people to God. All of the love, riches, and wonder of the Lord are found in Him. One has said, "The life of Jesus Christ is a massive and perfect diamond of glory, with an infinite number of facets that throw off radiance and dazzle the eyes of His followers for all eternity."¹

To know God and to enjoy true life in Him, one must be familiar with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowledge about such things is best found in God's Word. While there are many places in Scripture that tell of the gospel, I would like us to consider one specific verse. In John 20:31, the apostle John provided a sort of conclusion to his gospel account. He said, "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

John's words in John 20:31 came on the heels of an encounter Jesus had with one of His disciples. Jesus had been raised, but one named Thomas doubted the gospel. Jesus appeared to the man and showed him the scars from His crucifixion. Seeing the Lord face to face, Thomas believed in Jesus, saying, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). After telling of such things, John transitioned to provide a conclusion to his gospel account. His conclusion was designed to summon his readers to the same faith Thomas had exhibited. John wanted all too see that Jesus was a massive, perfect diamond who could give life and light to all.

All the Books of the World

In giving his conclusion, John made a remarkable observation about the life of our Lord. He said, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). Later, in his final conclusion for his gospel, John would say, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

Imagine a vast, posh library. See in your minds eyes mahogany shelves lined with volumes upon volumes. Look down corridors and hallways lined with books. Behold shelves ascending to the ceiling, all stocked with thick books containing innumerable pages that detail the many subjects of various academic disciplines. Think about readers and students laboring at desks, studying and reading from stacks and stacks of the library's volumes. In considering the imaginary library in your mind's eye, realize this — all of the books of the world could never provide a full description of the glories of Jesus!

¹ Davis, M. Andrew. *The Power of Christian Contentment*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 80.

John wanted his readers to understand that they could never fully comprehend Jesus. However, he also wanted them to know that Jesus could be known. Like doubting Thomas from John 20:28, those who read his gospel had an opportunity to trust and believe in Jesus. That's why John wrote John 20:31 — "...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The short and succinct words from the apostle contain riches of gospel truth. From them, we can deduce several life-changing truths. Let's consider three.

THE BINDING POWER OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

John's words in John 20:31 reveal the binding power of God's Word. Within Scripture, we have an accurate and trustworthy account of gospel truth. The Bible is a book of all books. It is a solid foundation for spiritual truth. This is seen through the way John said, "...but these *are written*." The phrase "it is written" was a popular way in the ancient world of referring to the authority of Holy Scriptures.

In the original language of the text, John used a perfect tense verb. Thus, his words conveyed the idea of permanency. One has said that the language indicates that what was written "stands" as authoritative.² John's language indicated that his writings were a dogmatic account concerning the truth of Jesus. His readers could have confidence that his words would not lead them astray.

Elsewhere in his gospel account, John used the word "written" to speak of the authoritative nature of Scripture. In speaking of the way one named Philip announced the coming of Jesus, John depicted the man as saying, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets *wrote*, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). The word "wrote" spoke of the Hebrew Scriptures, the sacred writings that were deemed authoritative for most of John's readers.

Interestingly, Jesus used the term "written" to speak of Himself. When responding to critics who grumbled against His teaching, He appealed to the authority of Scripture. In John 5:46, He said, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he *wrote* of me." In John 6:45, He said, "*It is written* in the Prophets" (John 6:45).

John would later indicate that many of Jesus' mighty works were a fulfillment of things *written* in Scripture (John 12:14). He would also speak of how the twelve disciples would remember and believe the things that were *written* about Jesus after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection (John 12:16). For John, the issue of what was *written* was significant. The Scriptures of the Old Testament had authoritatively foretold of Jesus' coming. In addition, his own gospel account was an authoritative account of Jesus' coming to Earth. His readers were to trust His words as if they were Scripture, just as they would have trusted the Law and the Prophets as being Scripture.

John would reiterate this point in the last words of his gospel account. In giving a final conclusion to what he wrote, the apostle would say, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). Notice the way John was intentional to speak of what he had "written." The apostle's language was often used of binding, authoritative religious or civil documents.³ It was used in the Synagogue in relation to the sacred writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. It was used in government of binding legislation. Applied to John's gospel account, this word indicated that his gospel contained absolute, binding truth concerning the person and work of Jesus. One could obtain fixed realities concerning the gospel from John's writings.

Authority is often a negative concept to modern minds. Certainly there are abuses of authority amongst unredeemed humanity; however, such abuses do not negate the need for

² Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 227.

³ Zodhiates, 393.

spiritual authority. Without a fixed standard of spiritual truth, humanity has no way of knowing who God is, what's wrong with the world, and how the human condition can be remedied.

Bible believing Christians have often held to a doctrine known as "the authority of Scripture." Such teaching maintains that the Bible is "...the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried."⁴ Because Scripture is God's Word (Psalm 12:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), it is true (John 17:17) and it is a sure standard of truth for all we do, think, believe, and say in our Christian lives.

To know God, we must look to the Bible for truth. Our thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions will fail us. Culture, society, and the prevailing wisdom of this world can't lead us to a full knowledge of God. Scientists, political leaders, or even preachers aren't the final authority for spiritual truth in our lives. YouTube, Twitter, or social media aren't reliable when it comes to truly knowing God. One cannot know how to be made right with God through mere human imagination or speculation.

Ultimately, the Bible is the only safe, secure, and are guide for our souls. Do you read the Bible? Are you looking to Scripture for truth about Christ? Are you gradually growing your knowledge of its contents? Is it your source for spiritual truth? John's words in John 20:31 reveal that you can only truly know the good news of God through the authority of Scripture.

THE NECESSITY OF TRUST IN CHRIST

Faith is also a critical component of gospel truth. In order to experience the benefits of Christ's life, one must exhibit a personal trust in Christ. John made such things clear in John 20:31 through his use of the word "believe" — "...so that you may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..."

The Greek word used for "believe" was a popular one in John's gospel. In John 1:7, the term was used to speak of the purpose of John the Baptist's ministry: "He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him." In John 1:12, the word indicated that all of the benefits of salvation are applied to one's life through faith: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." In one of the most oft-repeated verses in all of Scripture, Jesus affirmed the place of believing in Christian salvation: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

What Does It Mean to "Believe" in Jesus?

One must clarify what it actually means to "believe" in Jesus. John's words in John 20:31 shouldn't be interpreted as referring to a mere mental assent to a body of facts. Believing in Jesus for salvation involves much more than a mere acknowledgement of His existence. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once rightfully acknowledged, "The trouble with us is that we have substituted believes for faith."⁵ Some glibly believe they are in Christ because they profess a "belief" in Christ. It is important to note that saving belief involves a confidence, trust, reliance, or faith in certain realities. But which realities must one believe or trust? John clarified such matters by speaking of two realities related to the person and work of Jesus — "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

"Jesus is the Christ"

The word rendered "Christ" in John 20:31 was a popular one in the first-century world. Contrary to popular understanding, it was not a last name for Jesus, as if Jesus' first name was "Jesus" and His last name was "Christ." The latter name was an official title. It was used of

⁴ The Southern Baptist Convention. *The Baptist Faith & Message*. (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2000), 7.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Law and Grace: Two Dangers to Avoid. The Banner of Truth Magazine: 577*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 14.

the hotly anticipated deliverer of Israel — “the Messiah.” The term literally meant “Anointed One.” Starting with Genesis 3:15, the Hebrew Scriptures had told of the way a Redeemer would come to rescue God’s people from Satan and sin. The Old Testament revealed how the Lord raised up a nation (Genesis 12:1-8), a national system of worship (Deuteronomy 7:6-11) , and an appointed king (2 Samuel 7:12) that pointed to the coming of such a Deliverer.

While hopes for the Anointed One were high at the time of Jesus’ birth, God’s chosen nation had lost sight of the real purpose of His coming. National expectations caused many to look for a political emancipator. The idea of Messiah performing a work on behalf of sin had become nearly obsolete. When He ministered on Earth, Jesus reminded people of His primary purpose in coming to humanity. He once said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Because the first humans transgressed God’s commandments, they experienced alienation from God. Their sin, along with its consequences, spread like a pandemic to all of humanity. For humanity to be rescued from sin, a Deliverer was needed. But that Deliverer had to be human. Since humans were the ones who committed sin, and since humans bore the guilt of their sin, a human Deliverer was required.

In coming to Earth, Jesus embraced humanity so that He might serve as a Savior from sin. He functioned as a sort of “Second Adam,” living the perfect life the First Adam failed to live (Genesis 3:1-7). Jesus then offered His righteous life as a substitute and sacrifice on behalf of sinners. Scripture says, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Romans 5:18).

This is what’s involved in the belief or trust that brings salvation — a trust that Jesus was the Son of God who lived and died for sin. Saving faith isn’t a mere blind belief in God. It is not an aimless and vague thing. It involves a confidence in Jesus, that Jesus functioned as the Christ — the Anointed One who lived, died, and was raised on behalf of sin. One has noted, “...life becomes ours, not in some mystical or mysterious manner, but in the ‘name’ of Jesus; that is, entirely by his merits and on his account. It comes by virtue of all that Jesus is and all that he has accomplished.”

“The Son of God”

Christian salvation is based on Jesus’ role as a human substitute for sin. However, it is important to clarify that Jesus was more than a man. While He was one hundred percent human, He was also one hundred percent God. Two natures — human and divine — were fully present in the life of our Lord. To provide rescue from sin, Jesus had to be both God and man. One has said that to deny either Jesus’ humanity or divinity is “...to deny the Jesus of the Bible and to rob us of our Redeemer.”⁶

John emphasized such things in John 20:31 by also calling Jesus “the Son of God.” The title pointed to Jesus as the only human ever born of God. It meant, as one Greek scholar has said, that Jesus was “very God of God.”⁷ Our Lord was, and is, God’s one-of-a-kind and unique Son of God (John 3:16). Such truth is critical to our salvation. One has commented: “To have an all-sufficient Lord and Savior, the Christ must be both divine and human.”⁸

Jesus Himself affirmed His divine nature in John 8. In answering His religious adversaries on one occasion, He boldly said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). The title “I Am” was used amongst the Jews as one of the most sacred names for God. Jesus’ use of the title for Himself was an unmistakable claim at divinity.

⁶ Wellum, Stephen J. *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 240.

⁷ Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume V*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), 317.

⁸ Wellum, 184.

It was necessary for Jesus to be divine, since a human alone could not pay for sin. Because all men and women are marred by Adam's first sin (Romans 5:17), no mere human could offer a perfect sacrifice. A mortal man or woman could not deal with humanity's sin problem. However, Jesus qualified as a suitable substitute, because He was fully God. Because He was born of the Holy Spirit, He had no sin and He was able to live a fully righteous life on our behalf.

The Object of Faith

When John spoke of the way "believing" brings salvation, He was talking about a belief or trust in the God Man, Jesus Christ. It is a reliance on the offering of Christ's perfect life for sins that brings salvation. Such is the object of faith — Jesus, the one who was fully God and fully man, living and dying for the sins of sinners who deserve separation from God. One Bible commentator has said, "...transformation of life...is not based on mere acceptance of creedal formulas...nothing less than a dynamic believing in the person of Jesus, who is both Christ and Son of God" is the means of our salvation.⁹

Perhaps an example can help us think of how salvation works. I remember when I opened my first bank account. Because of my young age, I wasn't able to open one on my own. I had to have an adult represent me and co-sign for me. My Dad fulfilled that role on my behalf. His age and financial standing made him a fitting representative.

Something similar happens with Christian salvation. In order to have a relationship with God, we need a representative to stand on our behalf. Our sins disqualify us from access to God. Because Jesus was fully God and fully man, He was qualified to represent us before God. He lived a perfect life and died for our sins. It is through trusting in His work on our behalf that we are converted. Faith in Him brings the forgiveness of sins and new life.

THE EXPERIENCE OF A NEW TYPE OF LIFE

John spoke of the end result of Christian salvation by saying, "...that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The word rendered "that" in John 20:31 is one that expressed purpose in the ancient world. Altogether, John's gospel was a heaven-sent account that was written so that others might believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. The end result of such believing was *life*.

The word "life" is a significant one in the Christian religion. Some think of salvation as being only about the forgiveness of sins. Others think of it as simply a rescue from hell. John revealed that Christianity involves so much more than these things. It involves life!

Jesus Is Life

The Greek word translated "life" in John 20:31 is the word from which we get our word "zoo." It was used by the Greeks to speak of the opposite of death. It often referred to physical life. However, the term is used in a unique way throughout the New Testament to speak of the Christian experience. When applied to the believer's standing in Christ, it refers to the "supernatural life which is received by believers as a gift from God."¹⁰

John's gospel is rich with references to such life. In John 3, Jesus revealed that such life was the very reason He came to Earth: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). He told His disciples that He lived and died so that His people might escape the destructive power of Satan and experience a qualitatively better type of life: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it

⁹ Borchert, Gerald L. *The New American Commentary: John 12–21. Vol. 25B.* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), [CD-Rom].

¹⁰ Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 187.

abundantly” (John 10:10). The Devil and his world system deals in deceit, darkness, depression, and death. Jesus gives light, truth, joy, and life!

Because new life is such an integral part of Jesus’ work, He actually used the term as a title for Himself. On one occasion, He sought to comfort a woman who had lost her brother to physical death. In doing so, He said, “I am the resurrection and *the life*. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). On another, He told His disciples how they could be assured of going to heaven when they died. He flatly said, “I am the way, and the truth, and *the life*. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The Good News of God

In all of this talk about the life we have in Jesus, it is important to remember the exact nature of such life. Remember, the idea is of supernatural life. Eternal life is so much more than just “living forever,” or not going to hell. The life Christ gives is all about life with God. Sin has separated humanity from a soul-to-soul relationship with its Creator, but Jesus did a work to provide a restoration of this relationship. Because Christ lived and died, men and women can be reconciled to God. They can know God and enjoy all of the benefits that come from closeness to Him. Jesus used the word *life* later in John’s gospel when He said “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Do you know these things? Have you been transformed by Christ? Are you enjoying life in Him? Realize this — the goal of the gospel isn’t simply to make you religious or moral. The overarching aim of Christianity is to give you life in God. In the midst of all of the activities of life, are you experiencing real life in Christ? Do you know His freedom, joy, and purpose?

Before we conclude, one last reference to Jesus’ use of the word “life” may help us. In John 6, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger” (John 6:35). His hearers were well accustomed to the nature of bread. In the ancient world, the food was what sustained life. Jesus’ words indicated that He was the sure source of spiritual sustenance and life.

Jesus’ bread metaphor is helpful for me. It reveals that Jesus provides the spiritual nourishment we need. It also paints a picture of what’s required in order to experience such nourishment. To pass from death to life, one must partake of Jesus! Just as a hungry people willingly place bread in their mouths, one must place the eyes of faith on God’s Son in order to be filled with God’s life. Have you received Christ? Eat His bread and be one who is always looking unto Him (Hebrews 12:2)!