

## Fingerprint - Gospel

**October 13, 2013**

Does anyone feel guilty? Maybe it was something you did in your past. It was so big and horrible that even though you were never caught, you wonder if Jesus truly forgives you. For others of you, maybe it isn't the size of your sin but the amount of it. This week, you failed God again in the same way you did last week and the week before. Like a woodpecker smashing its head into the same place on a tree, you fall again and again to the same sin in the same you. You are disgusted with yourself. You know Christ forgives sins and maybe the same sin three times, but does he forgive us the same sin hundreds of times? When you think of your sin, do you feel guilty?

We are in a series called, "Fingerprint: What makes Faith Church unique?" In this series, we are studying the core values of Faith Church. These are the values we are striving to replicate in our new Spencer campus and in any campuses God allows us to open in the future.

Each of our core values is built off a key word. Our first core value was built around the word *Bible*. The Bible is foundation to all we do at Faith Church. We believe the Bible is the Word of God and without error. God didn't stutter when he spoke. Since the Bible is the Word of God, we highly value the relevant preaching and teaching of the Bible. Putting our finger in the text and teaching from God's Word is something you will find on all our campuses.

Last week, we examined our second core value. It is based around the key word *community*. At Faith Church, we strive to be a community of authentic

relationships that serve one another. We speak the truth in love to one another and serve one another. We are not spectators at a football game where we come to sit and watch paid professionals. We are a body where every member has a role to play and every member is needed. We are like Legos. God designed us to be different but God also created us to connect to one another. It is when we connect to one another, through serving, that we fulfill our purpose and become what God designed us to be.

This morning, we look at our third value. It is built off the key word *gospel*. Let's read the statement that goes with it.

**Gospel - We believe the gospel message is the power to change lives and grow the church.**

If I asked you what it takes to grow a church, I would get a variety of answers. Some would say a church grows when it has a rockin' worship band. If we had a guy for worship leader that played the electric guitar, had tattooed arms and jumped off amps like he was playing for The Who; that would bring in the young people. It would grow the church. Some people think the secret to church growth is the pastor. If we had a young pastor that walked with a swag, dressed in Hollister clothing, had a goatee and kept everyone laughing, many think that would grow the church. Others believe the secret to church growth is events. Bring in a Christian band and everyone will come to church. If you have an athletic bend, bring in the Power Team. They are body builders who came to Christ. After they come off steroids, before they shrink to the size of normal humans, they have them tour around churches bending steel bars. Have them on stage and the church will grow.

Events aren't wrong. Contemporary worship and a gifted preacher are not wrong. They will gather a crowd, but they won't change a life or grow the church.

We believe lives are changed and the church grows by the power of one thing, the simple gospel message.

### **What does the Bible tell us about the gospel?**

The word gospel is simply a Greek word that is transliterated into English. In Greek, the word gospel simply means, *good news*. The church is similar to ABC, NBC and CNN. They are news organizations that focus on bad news and change lives out of fear. When there is a problem on the other side of the world in an oil rich nation, the price goes up at the gas pumps because of the bad news. The church is also a message centric organization. Unlike ABC, NBC and CNN, our job is to tell people God's good news. Our news also changes lives but not out of fear. The Bible tells us that the simple gospel message is infused with power by God and when it is heard, God's Holy Spirit uses it to change lives and grow the church. As a church, we must be careful not to underestimate the power of the simple gospel message. Look what the apostle Paul told us.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16 (ESV)

Paul also tells us to not be seduced into feeling we need to dress up the simple gospel message to give it help we think it may not need. Paul talks about this.

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 1 Corinthians 1:17 (ESV)

Let's review.

1. **The church is a news organization.** Our job is to tell people God's good news, the gospel. It is news that God uses to change lives and grow the church.
2. **There is power in the good news of God.** Even though the good news of God seems like simple words, it is infused by God with divine power to change lives. It is the way people are brought into a relationship with God and the church grows.
3. **Don't use packaging that distracts from the power of the gospel.** This doesn't mean we don't use creativity. It means the simple gospel message has God-given power. It doesn't need to be presented in 3D graphics, it doesn't need hype, flashing lights and emotion to change lives. On the contrary, too much hype actually distracts from the power of God.

Now that we understand the importance of this simple message, let's find out what it is. What is the simple gospel message?

### **What is the gospel?**

#### **The gospel is bad news.**

The gospel message is a two-part story. First, the bad news. The Bible tells us God is absolutely perfect. All who do not match his perfection are "sinners." A sinner is someone who misses God's standard of perfection. Sin sounds like a churchy word. It actually comes from the world of archery. It means anything less than center-punching the bullseye. Some of us are one ring out; others of us are two rings out. Some of us can't even hit the target. The one

thing we have in common is we all sin to some degree because we are less than God intended. Sin of any size and amount separates us from God.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23 (NIV)

The problem of sin began with Adam and Eve when they chose to follow a new leader in the Garden of Eden instead of God. They rebelled and chose to follow the leadership of Satan and eat from a tree God told them not to eat from, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That made them sinners. From that point forward, they passed down in the human race the guilt of their sin and their love of sin. We reaffirm our allegiance to their rebellion on a daily basis when we choose to sin, just like they did.

Sin is not just grievous acts on the outside, like murder,, it is hatred on the inside. It is not just what we consciously choose to do wrong, it is what we neglect to do right. Sin is not just in our actions, it is in what we dream at night and even what motivates us. The Bible says sin affects every part of our lives. Sin, at its core, is desiring something more than we desire God. The Bible says, because of our sins, we are all scheduled to be separated from God's goodness at our deaths and to be punished eternally and justly for our sins.

It would seem there is an easy fix to this problem. Just stop sinning. Here is where we find the real problem. When we see our sin, we promise ourselves to give it up, but we don't — we can't. Each one of us is drawn back to our sinful habits by an unseen force within us that attracts us to them like a magnet is drawn to a steel beam. Sinful people trying to make themselves clean is futile. It is like trying to use a muddy hand to wipe the dirt off a white shirt. It is hopeless.

Nobody can break free from the allure and power of sin. If there is any help, it has to come from outside of us. The only one who can fix the problem of sin is God. The good news of the Gospels is God took it upon himself to fix that problem. God took the initiative and did for us what we cannot do. He did it by his son, Jesus Christ.

**The gospel is the good news because of Jesus.**

Jesus is God's own son. The name *Jesus* literally means "deliverer." The name *Jesus* means the one who came to save. Jesus came to Earth on a mission to save us from the consequences and power of our sins. We often hear the name Jesus Christ. Christ was not Jesus' last name. It describes Jesus' identity. The proper way to say it is that Jesus is the Christ. The word Christ means "anointed one." It means someone apart by God for a special purpose. In the Old Testament, the prophets foretold that God would send someone set apart for the special purpose of saving us from sin. In the Old Testament, this person was called *the Messiah*. The word Messiah means "anointed one" in Hebrew. It is the same meaning as the word Christ in Greek.

God promised to send someone set apart for the special purpose of dealing with the problem of sin called the Messiah in Hebrew or the Christ in Greek. None of the prophets understood the anointed one would be God's own son. Nobody imagined that God's own son would humble himself and fuse himself permanently with a human body to die in our places for our sins.

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 (ESV)

The good news in its simplest form is that we are helplessly addicted to our sins. We can't save ourselves. God loves us. He sent his son to die in our places, for our sins. Jesus came to save us. When we trust him to forgive our sins and be in charge of our lives, he will.

While the gospel is a simple bad news-good news story, it is also like a diamond. When we examine it under the light from different angles that the beauty of the Gospel is seen. For the remainder of this morning, let's look at some of the facets of the gospel diamond.



### **What does God's gospel mean for my life?**

#### **The gospel means my guilt is gone.**

When we sin, we are filled with guilt for what we have done. We struggle with self-hatred. Indeed, we should feel that way. Sin makes us wince because it is not the way we were designed to live.

Here is the good news of the gospel. When Christ died on the cross, his righteousness so overbalanced the guilt of our sins that his death was sufficient payment for all the sins of our pasts, presents and futures. His death on the cross was sufficient payment for the sins of the entire world for all of time.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God... 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

This morning, if you are a Christian continuing to wrestle with guilt of your sin, the good news of the gospel is that if you have trusted Christ to save you from your sin, it doesn't matter the size of your sin or the amount of your sin, even if it is the same sin over and over again. Christ's death on the cross so

overbalances the guilt of your sin that you cannot sin in a way that Jesus' death on the cross has not already paid for. All of your guilt is taken away.

As Christians, if we live in guilt after we come to Christ because we wonder if God will truly forgive us, that means we don't understand how good the good news of the gospel actually is. He saves us by taking away the guilt of all of our sins for all of time. That is good news.

**The gospel means my identity comes from Christ, not my shame.**

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

Martin Luther talked about this as the great exchange. Not only did Jesus pay for all of our sins on the cross and so overbalance our sin so that there is no sin that can separate us from him, but the good news is that God gives us all of Christ's righteousness when he takes away our sins.

One of the problems with guilt is shame. Guilt is feeling bad for what you have done. Shame is when guilt goes deeper and you are disgusted with who you are. Jesus doesn't just take away the guilt of what we have done but he takes away the shame and disgust we have with ourselves. The gospel is that when God looks at you, he sees the perfection of his own son, he doesn't see the scared life of your past. All of our sins went to the cross with Jesus and all of Jesus' perfection and beauty went to us.

If you grew up living a promiscuous life, even though Christ has forgiven you, when you look at yourself in the mirror you see damaged goods. You are filled with shame for what you have done. If you had a spouse that cheated on you and left you, you see yourself as scared and shamed. Jesus takes that



away. The good news of the gospel is *your identity is not what has been done to you, it is in what Jesus has done for you*. God doesn't look at you and see your past, he looks at you and sees a whole new creation through Jesus, with the purity of his own son. That is good news.

**The gospel means God the Father loves me as much as he loves his own son.**

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

The good news of the gospel is God loves us with as much love as he has for Jesus, his own son. That is why we are called children of God.

I have three kids. If someone were to ask me which of my three kids I love the best, I couldn't tell you. I love all three. The good news is God adopted us into his family. He loves his adopted children as much as he loves his own son. This is how God loves us.

Some of us are lonely and feel unloved. If you have trusted Christ's death, you are loved by God and you can't be any more loved by God than you are right now. We are his kids. This is earth-shattering. You do not find this anywhere else but the Bible.

**The gospel means God gives me his love, he doesn't require me to gain it.**

Even though God's love for us is amazing, Jesus tells us some won't experience it. Some will spend eternity in hell (Matthew 22:33). While the good news of Jesus' amazing love for us on the cross is that it is sufficient for all, it does not necessarily apply to everyone. How do we know if this good news, the

Gospel, applies to us? What needs to happen in our lives for us to take advantage of it?

God does not ask us to do a pilgrimage to Mecca. He does not ask us to feel especially mournful or to do penance for our sin. *The good news is God gives me his love, he doesn't require me to do anything to gain it but trust him.*

This may be new to some of you. God reaches down into our lives when we hear the gospel message and he makes something supernaturally click in our hearts. In that moment, when we hear the good news and the Holy Spirit makes it click so we see our sins and choose to trust in Jesus to save us from it, we are saved. Look at what the apostle John said about how salvation works.

**We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 (ESV)**

If you love Jesus, it is because God chose to love you first. He reached into your heart when you heard the message and brought you to see your sins and understand the futility of trying to fix yourself. He caused us to repent of our sins and trust in Jesus to save us from them. The gospel is all about God loving us first before it is anything we do for him.

Paul said that before God chose to love us, we were so hopelessly addicted to our sins that we could not do anything to love God.

**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved... Ephesians 2:1, 4–5 (ESV)**

**The gospel means I will live forever with Christ.**

The good news of the gospel is that just as Christ conquered death and rose from the grave, our death is not the bitter end. The gospel message is that

because God loves us, when we die, we do not suffer the consequences of sin because Jesus paid for our sins. Instead, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... 2 Corinthians 5:6 (ESV)

When Christ returns, he will raise our decayed or cremated body from the dead and recreate it into a new indestructible body, just like his own resurrection body. We will live eternally with him, first on this planet for a thousand years and ultimately on a new heavens and a new earth when Jesus defeats Satan, sin and death. We will rule and reign on the new creation with Christ and under Christ. We don't deserve any of this. It is all a gift from God's love through Jesus. This is part of the good news. It is the gospel. It is what we mean when we say Jesus saves.

**The gospel means what God began in me, he promises to complete in me.**

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

As Christians, when we sin, we do not stop being his children. Our status is not determined by what we do for Christ but by what Christ has done for us. All we can do is rest in Jesus. It is our confidence in God's infinite kindness that gives us the desire to honor him and willingness to return to him when we sin (Romans 2:4).

This doesn't mean God won't correct us when we sin. The Bible tells us that because God loves us, just like a good parent, he will correct us.

...because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son. Hebrews 12:6 (NIV)

One of the reasons God puts us through hard times is to break us from habitual sin. Even when we are in the midst of God's toughest corrections, we remember our status as God's child never changes. Since God loved us first, he won't let us go. He will save us all the way to the end.

**The gospel means God provides the resources I need for victory over sin.**

One of the great desires of those who love Jesus because they are first loved by him is that our lives would bring glory to God. Yet, we find ourselves often defeated by temptations and our own weaknesses. While the world thinks of God's laws as party stoppers, Christians understand God's commands actually lead us in the paths most pleasing to him and most satisfying to us. Before God shone his love into our hearts through Jesus, we weren't able to not sin. Once God saves us, he gives us the supernatural resources we need to not sin. The easiest of these to take advantage of is a new-found appetite for God's Word and prayer. These draw us to Christ and we begin to think God's thoughts after him.

Satan will still try and convince us that it's only natural to fail and that we cannot resist sin. Yet, God's Word says we can resist because we are no longer dependent just on our natural strength but on the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

Probably the most powerful antidote to sin is knowing that even if we do not win every battle against sin, God loves us no less. The only people who get better spiritually are those who know if they never get better, they are loved no

less. It sounds backward. It sounds impossible. Won't people just sin more if they know they are loved no less when they sin? Those God loves do not love sin. Let's explore why God's infinite kindness is such a powerful antidote.

What gives sin power in your life? Sin has power because we love it. If sin was not attractive, it would have no power to tempt us. What is the only way that our love for sin can be displaced? It has to be displaced by a greater love. When we love Jesus more than our sins, we want to please Jesus more than we want to indulge in sin (John 14:15). The unconditional love of Jesus in spite of our sins is so attractive it drives out of our lives our love for sin. Jesus' love is more attractive than sin. That is good news.

### **How is the gospel misunderstood?**

#### **Don't think my faith in Christ is a work I did to deserve the love of Christ.**

Some people think their faith in Christ makes them smarter than others. After all, I chose Christ. If others aren't smart enough to make a good choice, it is their fault. I am saved because I chose to have faith.

Think about this. Is it true that my faith saves me? If my faith in Jesus is ultimately something I did to earn Jesus, I am ultimately saved by my works, not by Jesus' mercy.

We love God because God first loved us. Seeing our sin, repenting of sin and trusting in Jesus to save us from sin, only happens when God works supernaturally in a life after they hear the gospel message of the bad news and the good news of Jesus.

**Don't think it is the strength of my faith that saves me.**

Some people think that by a sufficient degree of psychological effort or theological study they can pump enough faith into their hearts to earn God's love. The good news is that it is not the strength of our faith that earns God's love.

If it was the strength of our faith that saved us, it would be like a lifeguard that rescued a drowning swimmer. When the rescued swimmer arrived to land he began boasting he was saved because he held on to the lifeguard tighter than anyone else. He was saved not because he held on to the lifeguard. He was saved because the lifeguard held on to him.

Biblical faith, which is a gift from God, is to think of ourselves as entirely exhausted from trying to swim and having no strength at all. Jesus (the lifeguard) chooses to love us and save us. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves but to trust him completely to save us. Our hope is not found in the strength of our faith, it is found in the strength of God's love.

This morning, many of you are striving and scratching to make God love you. You look in the mirror each morning and think you can do something to deserve God's love. Folks, we can't earn God's love. All we can do is completely trust him. It is not about the strength of our grip on God but we are confident on the strength of his grip on us.

If, this morning, you love Jesus and trust in him alone, that is the evidence of saving faith. That is the gift from God to you. That is all it takes. That is the gospel. Jesus saves. He does all of it. He even chooses to love us first so we can love him back.

## Conclusion

It is the simple gospel message that has the God-given power to change lives. We are hopelessly sinful but, through Jesus, God is incredibly loving beyond our wildest imaginations. That changes everything. How should we respond?

**1. Let the gospel change you life.** Some of you have known the gospel message since you were a child, but you have never looked into it and saw the beauty of its facets. If that is you, take one facet of the gospel diamond that we talked about in the second half of this message and commit it to heart. Have your Life Group leader and your family quiz you this afternoon on which one you have chosen. Apply it to your life all week long.

**2. Embrace the true gospel.** Many of us came this morning with an incomplete or distorted picture of the gospel. I hope this morning we cleared some of that up. While there is incredibly bad news apart from Jesus, there is incredibly good news with him. If God was working in your heart this morning and having the gospel click for the first time in your life, talk with me after the service. I would love to celebrate that moment with you.

**3. Share the simple gospel with confidence in its power.** It is this simple unadorned gospel message that God promises he will use to save lives and grow his church. This week, let's each of us share the simple bad news-good news story with someone in our lives.



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