

GRACE

Great Good News!

May 2004

For I am not ashamed of the gospel...for in it the **RIGHTEOUSNESS** of God is revealed (Romans 1:16-17).
But of God you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us **RIGHTEOUSNESS** (1 Corinthians 1:30).

I used to think the gospel is all about going to heaven...I suppose the gospel to me then was the "gospel of heaven." Of course I knew Jesus would be there, but my focus was subtly on me and me "making it" to heaven. My heart is being changed to focus on the precious living reality of Jesus now. And I am compelled to study the Bible more personally to share truth with others.

It is fascinating that of the nearly 600 references of "heaven" in the Bible, that less than about 10 are indicative of people going to heaven; most "heaven" verses refer to God's location. It thrills me now to realize that every verse in the Bible points to Jesus Christ and His righteousness. The entire Old Testament is about how people can get right with God through obeying God's holy commandments (Law). Then, the entire New Testament tells us that the purpose of the Law is to reveal that no one can ever become righteous this way, which is why we all need a Savior who can...we all need true righteousness that can never be *achieved* (see Galatians 3:24). So, God graciously provides us with a righteousness that can be *received*...through the gift of His dear Son. The word "righteousness" in this context is specifically referred to in the New Testament nearly 100 times!

So, the gospel is simply all about God's dear Son and His righteousness...the gospel is becoming to me the "gospel of Jesus Christ." And the gospel is not just ABOUT Jesus, the gospel IS Jesus! Acts 17:28 says that "In Christ we live and have our being," meaning that the source of true life and identity is Christ Himself. This is why Paul passionately proclaims "Christ is all in all" (Colossians 3:11) and "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

I had the privilege this month to start discipleship counseling sessions with four more precious people in Simpsonville, SC. I also had a special time helping teach a GraceLife Conference to seven others at Horse Shoe Baptist Church near Hendersonville, NC. It is so amazing to witness that there is not an issue in any person's life that this gospel of Christ cannot gloriously address.

We are tempted to see these glorious truths as too complex and too impractical. However, Jesus says you have to become as a little child to receive (not necessarily understand) this good news (Matthew 18:3). Following is a description of a Bible study at a chapel service where I help teach the gospel at the Boys Home of the South. I hope it is fun and encouraging to you as it was to the boys.

A GOSPEL EXPERIMENT

[A special thanks to Eternity Now Ministries (www.eternitynow.org) for this idea]

Into one bottle of clean water, two of the boys volunteered to add a little pepper, salt, hot sauce, buttermilk, vinegar, and ground-up possum meat (actually an Italian herb!). Ugh! None of the boys would drink it!

Then the boys mixed in some "good" stuff...fresh water, soda pop, sugar, and chocolate. I asked, "Does adding good things to this water take away the bad stuff?" "No," all of the about 25 boys responded. "You mean you still don't want to drink this?" "No way!" the boys responded. I explained that no one could ever do enough good things to take away the bad things. We need for someone else to completely take away the bad stuff we have done. And that's exactly what Jesus has done for us.

I put this yukky water bottle into a bag, and I pulled out another bottle with sparkling clean water. I said that when Jesus takes away our bad stuff (sins), He also gives us a new heart and His very life. A boy read John 7:37-38 that says Jesus gives us "rivers (not trickles) of living waters" that flow out of our new hearts. The source of these waters is Jesus Himself.

One of the smallest boys volunteered to complete the "experiment." He closed his eyes while one of the older boys put his hands over the little boy's eyes to make sure he didn't peek. I handed the little boy one of the bottles to drink, but didn't tell him which one. I asked him to trust me...and he ultimately did, and he drank the clean water. The chapel was warm and he was really thirsty!

One of the boys read Matthew 5:6 where Jesus says that those who are thirsty for true righteousness will be made joyful. I pointed out the fact that, in this experiment, how much faith the little boy had in me in giving him the pure water was not as critical as how faithful I was to give the little boy just what he needed! The little boy could have had a lot of faith in me, but I still could have given him the yukky water. I told the boys that it doesn't matter how much faith we have, that all we need is the faith of a teeny tiny mustard seed. The main thing is not how much faith we have, but how faithful Jesus is! Jesus saves us, not our faith...He is the one who is faithful to give us just what we need...His righteousness that flows out of a new heart.

by Gregg Gibbons

The gospel is profoundly simple. It is also simply profound! More of this on the back ⇨

Following is my personal “talking text” of Galatians 2:20-21. I have recently started breaking verses down like this instead of broadly reading over verses. The Bible is truly so rich...because Jesus Himself is so rich. I think I sort of got carried away with these two verses ☺! So, the following is kind of long, but I think it will be thought provoking, and I hope encouraging. Please know that I don’t understand much of this (in fact, I really don’t understand any of it ☺!) However...I believe it with all my heart...I believe this is truth as God is personally discipling me and Joy, and revealing life to us.

GALATIANS 2:20-21

**I have been crucified with Christ,
it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.
And the life I now live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God
who loved me and gave Himself for me.
For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.**

I [the old I who futilely tried to live independent of God...who selfishly tried to find a source of true life other than God]

have been crucified with Christ [the old I is not just cleaned up, the old I was taken away when his sins were taken away...the old I no longer exists...the old I died with Christ (Romans 6:6, 8 and Colossians 3:3)],

it is no longer I who live [the old I is no longer my point of reference, the old I who tried to live is forever gone!]

but Christ lives in me [yes, the old I is gone, but a new I has come...the old I died with Christ, and a new I was raised in Christ (Romans 6:4-5)...Jesus is the only true life source, and consequently, there is a living “me” (John 15:5)...I am a new creation IN Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)...now that’s great good news!].

And the life I now live in this body [yes, there is a new I, but the new I has no life source of his own...the new I has his life source in Jesus who is *life*...Jesus says “I am THE *life*” (John 14:6), not just another life option, but the only true life...the Greek word for *life* (*ζωή*) does not mean physical human life, but true life that is only in Jesus...so, it is no longer I with my own resources who live but the life of Christ who now lives through me...the life of Christ reveals the genuine me],

I live by faith in the Son of God [faith is not a condition for living abundantly...faith is the reality I miraculously experience as I simply live as if (taking God at His word) I am already alive in Christ (which I really am)...for I have no source of faith of my own...because Christ is my sole source of life, He is my source of faith...the original Greek wording and context is best translated “I live by THE faith and faithfulness OF the Son of God.” Beware of temptations of seeking to live by faith as a condition, as a burden that is up to you, for that is merely faith in faith and not faith in the Son of God living in you...and it puts all the focus on you, thereby subtly denying the very miraculous life of Christ in you!]

who loved me and gave Himself for me [Christ’s love for me is forever etched in that “tree” (the cross)...my life in Christ is personal because He loved and gave Himself for ME...and when I read further in Scriptures, Jesus assures me He will forever faithfully love me...and that He gave Himself FOR me in order to give His life TO me in order to live His life THROUGH me].

For if righteousness [being rightly related to God...having the righteousness of Christ, not a righteousness of my own...for Christ became sin for me so that I would become the righteousness of God (not of me) in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21).]

comes through the law , then Christ died in vain [if I had any other source to contribute to getting right with God, then there would have been no need for Christ to die for me...if I had any other source within me to obey God’s commands, then Christ would not have had to fulfill God’s holy Law for me...if I had any other source within me that could live for God and that could serve God, then Christ would not be my all in all...and that’s not great good news. However, my Father tells me in Romans 1:17 that He lovingly reveals true righteousness to me that is not of this world...and He tells me in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that He has given me His dear Son who has become (a completed act) righteousness FOR me. God has not infused me with righteousness, with the ability to do right - that’s the *gospel of morality* that can subtly lead to a *gospel of heaven*...however, God has miraculously infused me with the life of His dear Son Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, who has become now and forever my righteousness - that’s the *gospel of Jesus Christ*...and that’s THE greatest news of all!!!]



Here is Joy with her daddy on Veteran’s Day the November before he passed away (he has on a USS Ronald Reagan hat that Joy bought him ☺!). Although Joy was in pain then (we had just learned of her back situation), we took him to Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day events that year. He was so touched to stand under the Navy flag with his comrades as everyone applauded them during “Anchors Away.” He served on the destroyer USS Collett in the Pacific in WWII. He would be so proud to know about the WWII Memorial in Washington. It’s been amazing to hear about millions of young people (mostly country boys like Joy’s daddy) who fought for us, and 400,000 who died for us. So Joy’s daddy is one of the main reasons this newsletter can be freely written for over 200 families in 16 States. And he is a main reason Joy is persevering in the battle for her life. Her blood tests still indicate no infection two months after being completely off antibiotics...her pain is generally less...she is slowly venturing out of the house more to walk and to climb steps for physical therapy, with each venture followed by 2 to 3 days of recuperation. It’s as if she is learning to walk again, with a heart to say, “Look daddy, look!” And knowing her heavenly Daddy’s gaze is fixed upon her is the foundation of her healing.