

advent

what Jesus aims to deliver



“Leadership”

Week 2 | December 9, 2018 | Luke 1:26-38

Sermon Summary

Some people want what has been called the “irreducible minimum gospel.” They want enough of gospel to save them and send them to heaven, but not enough to set them apart as belong solely to God right now. Does such a gospel exist? What is the gospel anyway?

Gospel means “good news” and if we’re asked to summarize the story in a headline and teaser blurb, most people would say something like, “Jesus died on the cross for our sins.” Or “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” Or “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son....” Our shorthand gospel is transactional and formulaic: $A + B = C$. *Admit you’re a sinner plus believe in Jesus equals Christian. Congratulations, you’re going to heaven!*

But while sin remediation and personal transformation are integral parts of the gospel, they’re not the first word on it. Some would say that, properly speaking, they aren’t even really the gospel. Rather, the gospel is the announcement of the kingdom of God. Jesus himself began his ministry saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe the good news! (Mark 1:15). Even Gabriel, at the annunciation, says that Mary will give birth to son who will reign on David’s throne and his kingdom will never end.

This is the news, and it’s very good. (By the way, in this respect news in the ancient world was just like it is today: Mostly political.) Not many years earlier, Caesar Augustus assumed the throne of his father, Julius. People considered Julius a god, so Augustus proclaimed himself the son of God. He sent out heralds with the good news: Augustus was their savior and king. He was the son of God reigning on Julius’ throne. “Peace on earth [Pax Romana] goodwill to men.”

The gospel is better news because it’s about an infinitely better King. The first word of the gospel is **God**. An angel from God announces how he will change Mary’s life and lead her into an infinitely better future. God is the inaugurator of his kingdom and the initiator of change in our lives. He makes great and precious promises which we can take as settled certainties. “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37, ESV). “No word from God will ever fail” (NIV).

Second, the gospel is good news because **God saves**. That’s the whole point of the virgin birth of Jesus, To set up a kingdom on just grounds, sin had to be dealt with. Now, being a distinctly human problem, sin must be paid for—and sentence served—by humanity. But given that our sins are infinite—impossible to count and in violation of God’s infinite holiness—only God himself can pay. Hence Jesus. The God-Man. The one person who can satisfy all conditions and truly save us. He lays down his *human* life of *infinite* worth for us. Now we can be brought back into God’s good graces and live safely under his reign.

And that’s a third major aspect of the goodness of the good news: **God reigns**. So many leaders, from Caesar Augustus down to the political powers of today, are public servants in name only. But Christ really has the good of his people in mind. His kingdom is “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Righteousness is a relational term referring to being rightly related to God and each other. Jesus' kingdom is one in which strife, mistrust, and discord will be abolished—not just by “rule” but by the radical transformation of the human heart. *Peace* speaks to the biblical concept of shalom, the wholeness and flourishing of all creation. One day Jesus will not merely enforce peace with a sword but will embody and enact peace by his sovereign, loving rule. All the pain, suffering, and oppression will cease. All the corruption, erosion, and rot will give way to glorious perfection. And *Joy* will be the final fruit. The utter satisfaction of our desires in a face-to-face life with God, and in enjoyment of all his blessings.

What can we do in response to this kingdom, this leadership that Jesus brings? We respond like Mary, “I am the Lord’s servant, may your word be fulfilled in me.” In other words, we lose our old lives to gain a new life. We abandon all hope of happiness and meaning apart from God and submit, in faith, to his good plans for us. God promises nothing less than the kingdom to those who embrace his kingship. Every promise becomes “yes” to us in Christ, and all will be fulfilled. “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Discussion Guide

1. Read Luke 1:26-38.
2. In the sermon we talked about the “irreducible minimum gospel”—that thing which some people want that, if it exists, offers a token but saving faith. Have you ever wanted that? Do you think such saving faith exists? What would you say to someone who “prayed the prayer” but doesn’t seem to be passionate about Christ?
3. While there is no tokenism in real Christianity, there is an “irreducible minimum” message; there is a simple gospel proclamation. And we said it is the good news of the kingdom of God. How is that different from the typical evangelical message of “Ask Jesus into your heart so your sins will be forgiven”?
4. Mary demonstrates what receiving the kingdom looks like. She parts with her life plans and submits to God’s plan. She literally receives Christ into her life.
 - On a practical level, what were some of the costs of her discipleship, of her receiving Christ?
 - What were some of the blessings?
 - How have you wrestled with following God’s leadership versus your own? Is submitting to Jesus as King and Lord typically easy for you, or hard?
 - Where is God leading you these days? Are there any movements you sense in your life, ways in which God is taking you somewhere new?
5. Consider the atheist prof who said this:

“The virgin birth story is about an all-knowing, all-powerful deity impregnating a human teen. There is no definition of consent that would include that scenario. Happy Holidays....
The biblical God regularly punished disobedience. The power difference (deity vs. mortal) and the potential for violence for saying “no” negates her “yes.” To put someone in this position is an unethical abuse of power at best and grossly predatory at worst.”

 - What would you say to him? Can you think of a gentle but persuasive way to respond?
6. In Luke 1:45 we read Elizabeth’s words to Mary, “Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!” What is a hope or promise of God that you’re holding onto this Christmas? Is your faith strong or weak in this season? How can we pray for you?