

4 - The Apostle's Gospel

Did John's Gospel change after the Cross?

We have seen that Jesus deliberately omitted the Cross from His Gospel, and that John followed his example when summarising the Gospel in his own Gospel account of Jesus.

Do we get a different version of the Gospel in the epistles? Here is John's summary of the Gospel in 1 John 1:5 :

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

This is very curious! Jesus doesn't even get a mention in this summary! The opening chapter of this letter is very clearly a proclamation of the Gospel:

" ... this we proclaim concerning the Word of life ... we proclaim to you the eternal life ... We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us." (v1,3).

The focus of John's message is God's light, not our sin and the means of forgiveness. John does talk about sin and adds that it is "the blood of Jesus that purifies us from all sin" (v7) but it is somewhat incidental:

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

The Gospel is the invitation to walk in fellowship with God, and the *consequence* is forgiveness. This is the reverse of the 4-spiritual laws that says we must first deal with our sin *so that* we can walk in fellowship with God.

We can see that even many years after the Cross, when John was explaining the Gospel to a new generation, he still chose not to mention the Cross!

What did the Gospel in Acts focus on?

There are at least 17 descriptions of the Gospel in the Acts. Here is the complete list with the sermons in bold:

Acts 2:11; **Acts 2:17, 21, 23, 36, 38**; Acts 4:29-31; Acts 5:42; **Acts 7**; Acts 8:5-7, 12; **Acts 10:36-43**; **Acts 13:32-39**; Acts 14:3; **Acts 14:15**, 22; Acts 16:30-31; **Acts 17:7, 18, 30-31**; Acts 18:5; Acts 19:8; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:17-18; Acts 28:8-9; Acts 28:23, 31.

Only three descriptions of the Gospel include forgiveness of sins! The cross is mentioned only in 2:23, 2:36 and 10:39; in each case as a pre-cursor the the resurrection, which is a far more prominent theme.

A few passages emphasise turning to God in faith, but the main emphasis (at least 11 passages) emphasise Jesus as Messiah or King.

Here are some of the most illuminating examples:

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that **he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead**. (Acts 10:42-43)

"They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that **there is another king, one called Jesus**." ... Paul was **preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection**. ... "He commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when **he will judge the world with justice** by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:7, 16, 18, 30-31)

Acts 13:32, 38-39 "**We tell you the good news**: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, **by raising up Jesus** ... I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. **Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin**, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses."

Acts 14:15 **We are bringing you good news**, telling you to **turn from these worthless things to the living God**, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them"

Acts 26:17-18 "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and **turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may **receive forgiveness of sins** and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Acts 10:42-43 and Acts 26:17-18 are especially illuminating as they both tell us directly what Jesus told the disciples to preach.

On the six occasions where we get more detail the gospel is presented as a story of God acting in His world to reveal Himself to mankind. In each case Jesus' resurrection is the climax of the story, concluding that Jesus is the King of God's Kingdom and the rightful judge of all mankind.

Peter's Gospel

Peter, writing to the Jewish churches across Asia, reminds his hearers of the transforming power of the Gospel, and their reconciliation to God:

"You have been chosen ... to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood." (1 Peter 1:2)

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24-25)

Peter attributes our reconciliation to the cross. But we should note that this is not Peter preaching the Gospel to unbelievers, but explaining the means of our reconciliation to believers.

The Development of the Gospel

We can see some development in the way the Gospel was proclaimed. John adds a reference to the blood of Jesus purifying us from sin, and in the Acts we see frequent references to the resurrection. But neither of these additions change the focus, which remains the same as in the Gospel accounts; the proclamation that Jesus is King.

The Gospel of the King

The Gospel proclaimed after the Cross is still the good news that Jesus is the new King of the Age. His Kingdom has come and we are invited to participate. God's desire and invitation is for us to believe in and enter His Kingdom here and now on earth.