

The Gospel

After so many discussions of how the gospel is distorted by some, the time has come to conclude our studies with a brief review of the gospel. Obviously, we cannot in a short study cover all the aspects of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This we will study for eternity. But we can cover the essentials.

In this study, we have three basic objectives. First, we will show how all major elements of the gospel were predicted by OT prophets, Second we will see how those prophecies are exactly what the NT records as being fulfilled by Jesus. Finally, we will see how simple the gospel really is. Some churches, such as the Catholic and Mormon Churches, argue that the gospel contains so many complex doctrines that only through the ministry of an infallible church can the individual understand the gospel. We will see how totally false this concept is. It will not be possible to cover more than a few of the texts which could be used in this study, for the scriptures all speak of Jesus (John 5:39). Instead, we will pick a select few representative texts.

Our first task is to examine just who the Messiah was predicted to be. From the beginning of sin in this world (Q1a), there was promised a redeemer. The first prophecy in the Bible (Gen 3:15) is a promise of a Savior, given in the midst of the curse of sin. God could not bear to allow his creations to go one day in sin without the hope of salvation. Later on, a multitude of predictions amplify the fact that there will be one to come to rescue man. The very idea of a redeemer suggests someone who will pay the price for us. A savior is one who rescues us, without our ability to do so ourselves. Isaiah makes this so clear when he says that the savior would "bear our griefs." We are totally lost, without hope, and God provides an escape.

The next aspect of the Messiah is that he would be a messenger of the covenant (Q1b). The mention of a covenant brings to mind that there is a contract between God and man. God will rescue us from sin if we will simply trust him and be his people. "And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Amos 6:8) We can love him and do his bidding, or we can go our own way. We have control, but he is always faithful to save us if we trust and obey.

The promised Messiah was to be a human (Q1c)! What a concept! All men have sinned, yet one of us was to become the Savior. At the same time, though, this was to be no ordinary birth. He was to be born to a virgin, a miraculous event with no parallel before or after. Jesus' favorite title, "Son of Man," taken from Dan 7 reflects this. In Jewish idiom, to call someone a "son of" something was to state the fundamental nature of that person. So the Son of Man is someone of fundamentally human nature. We may compare this with Jesus' description of Judas as the "son of perdition" (John 17:12). The genealogy of the Messiah was also provided in that he would be a descendant of David (Q1d) of the tribe of Judah.

At the same time, the Messiah was to be God (Q1e)! This only makes sense, for no mere man could atone for all the sins of mankind. At the same time it is a demonstration of the most profound miracle of love. God himself was to come down to earth to redeem us. The true God is not like the disengaged gods of any pagan people, but one who was willing to actually partake of our "flesh and blood" (Heb 2:14).

It should come as no surprise that Jesus fulfilled all of the prophecies concerning him (Q2). He was the Redeemer, messenger of the covenant, born of a virgin of the tribe of Judah, yet fully divine. Some will dispute the translation of John 1:1 and Heb 1:8, but the fact remains that throughout the NT we find that Jesus was God in human form. He retained his identity as a co-eternal co-equal part of the Trinity, while irrevocably setting aside his divine prerogatives (Php 2:5-11) to become flesh and blood. The magnitude of just this sacrifice should have us on our knees. No human mind can possibly understand just what Jesus gave up before he ever entered this world of sin as a helpless baby.

The fundamental problem to which Jesus provided the answer was sin. All have sinned (Rom 3:23) and therefore our lives are forfeit under the law. Only by the shedding of the blood of an innocent substitute (Q3a) could the sins be forgiven. This was the central feature of the OT sacrificial system. In particular we note that this substitute was not only innocent, in that the sacrificial animals could never sin, but that the animal must be completely unblemished (Q3b). But we should also note that Hebrews (Q3c) points out that the blood of animals was sufficient for the cleansing of the flesh only. A better sacrifice was needed to actually cleanse from sin.

The sacrifice presented was the Son of God Almighty. In order for him to be acceptable, he must meet all the requirements already shown in the typical annual atonement. He must be pure, blameless,

without spot or blemish. But if God simply walked the earth in all his power, then died, while the sacrifice would be sufficient, this would leave God open to charges that he was unfair. He demands of man that he walk without sin, yet no one could actually do so. So the Son of God became the Son of Man, and exposed himself to the same temptations that we are tempted with (Q4). It is worth exploring this a bit further.

Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus set aside his divine power and prerogatives to become one of us. The magnitude of this act alone is beyond comprehension. God himself sets aside all that he is in order to walk in the shoes of his creations. But this is not enough. Heb 2:14 tells us that he took on "flesh and blood," Paul's metaphor for the human tendency to sin. This tells us that the mere fact of being human does not condemn us as sinners, or Jesus would have been condemned from the moment of birth. It says, however, that all of us are susceptible to sin, a state to which we will become immune at the second coming (1 Cor 15:50-53). Jesus was just as susceptible as we are, but he did not sin (2 Cor 5:21, Heb 4:15). He certainly was tempted, showing his humanity, but he did not fall. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we, like Jesus, have no need to sin (1 Cor 10:13).

Because Jesus was unblemished (Q5a), he was able to serve as our sacrifice. He was resurrected, and ascended to become our High Priest in the heavenly tabernacle. There he presented his own blood as the atoning sacrifice (Q5b). In the language of the law of sacrifices, he literally became sin for us, so that we would become righteous (Q5c). What an awesome act! Mankind rebels against infinite God, who then comes to his creatures and offers them his very life so that we might live. Paul's metaphor of Jesus nailing our certificate of sin-indebtedness (*chierographon ton dogmasin* Col 2:14) to the cross seems pitifully inadequate.

The OT clearly identifies the fact that the Messiah was going to die (Q6). The Psalmist even identifies various elements of the crucifixion: Christ's immense thirst, his pierced hands and feet, the gambling for his clothes and so on. If we were to examine all of the OT prophecies, we would find an incredible amount of detail regarding his death. But our key concern at the moment is that it identifies that he would die in our place. When we look in the NT (Q7), we find that there can be no doubt that Jesus did in fact die as predicted. Every detail matches the prophecies. By his wounds we are truly healed.

But the Messiah was not predicted simply to die. The grave could not hold him (Q8), and he was to be resurrected. And, as predicted, this is exactly what happened (Q9). Paul points out the importance of this (Q10) in his statement that if Jesus had not actually been resurrected, our hope is in vain. This is worth considering for a moment. No OT sacrifice was ever brought back to life, so why should the Messiah?

The first requirement is that our entire hope is that of resurrection to eternal life. If Jesus, the Son of God is not resurrected, then by what bona fides may God hold out such hope to us? Second, because it was predicted that Jesus would be resurrected, both by the OT and by Jesus himself, a failure to be resurrected would indicate that Jesus was not the Messiah. Faith in anyone other than the true Messiah is worthless. Faith's value is not in its sincerity, but in its object. A worthless object of faith yields worthless faith, as billions of lost souls will learn.

After resurrection, the Messiah was to become our mediator (Q11), a task upon which all of us depend daily (Q12). This is actually the function of the priest, who went between God and man. As we examine scripture, we find that this is the term used for Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, where he is our High Priest. But the OT predicted (Q13) that he would be a special priest, one who is the King of Peace (literal translation of "Melchizedek"), and who is not selected by heredity. Indeed (Q14), Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi the tribe of priests, and holds the office of priest forever, being truly of the order of Melchizedek.

Having looked at the issues directly related to the Messiah's role in the gospel, we now turn to the role of the believer. Our first consideration is what effect the gospel has on the believer. Paul told Titus (Q15) that baptism was the "washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." This is a technical form which speaks of a new birth, exactly what Jesus told Nicodemus would be necessary (John 3:3). In Romans, Paul describes this as a transformation of the believer by the "renewing of (his) mind." The final objective of this is that we will be transformed into the glorious image of our Lord by the working of the Holy Spirit in us. True Christians will be everywhere visible by their appearance and actions in the world. They will be the reflection of Christ to the unbeliever.

This change is accompanied by the obligation (Q16) to "obey the gospel." It must be very clear that those of us who choose to follow Christ do not obey out of duty or fear, but love. We see the great gift given to us and can do no other than to try to be like our Savior. The first duty of all Christians (Q17) is to

keep the commandments of God. This is what all who love God will do, both because of the perfection of the law and as a love response to the one who saves us. Revelation identifies the saints as those who keep the commandments, not because commandment-keeping is the way to be saved, but because all who have been saved keep them in response to their salvation.

And it is definitely possible to keep the commandments (Q18). Jesus did so, and has promised to provide us with the tools to properly respond to temptation. John tells us that those who belong to God do not sin. This reinforces what was just said. Not only is it possible to not sin, we won't if we keep our eyes firmly on Christ and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But if for some reason we do happen to slip and fall, "we have an advocate with the Father." (Q19) Jesus, our intercessor, our defense attorney, stands before the Father to present his blood again for our sin. All we have to do is to ask.

This brings us to a key question. Can we do anything to add to the work of salvation done by Christ? (Q20) Paul answers this for us with an emphatic "NO!" All our works of righteousness are as filthy rags (Isa 64:6) and cannot add one bit to the atonement of Christ. But our works can, through the Holy Spirit, bring others to the foot of the cross. We are saved by our faith in the atonement of Christ, not by our good works. Paul's metaphor is particularly telling. He tells us that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

This calls up a rabbinical teaching that sin and salvation are like the balances of justice. If you sin, you put weights in the sin pan. Your good works *beyond the requirements of the law* put weights in the salvation pan. If your good works are more than your sins, then the scales tip toward salvation, and you are saved. Unfortunately, the image fails because it ignores one fact. The law is a standard of perfection. God promises that he will help us keep the perfect law. But, because the law is perfect, there is no way to do anything beyond its requirement. Even Jesus' perfect life could not put any weights in the salvation pan of this illustration. Therefore, the first sin condemns us, and nothing we can do will merit salvation. Only the blood of Christ buys our freedom.

When the final curtain rises, the gospel (*euangelion*, "good news") is one of judgment (Q21). God rises to render judgment in favor of the saints (Dan 7:26-7). This is good news indeed! We come to court, dressed not in our own garments, filthy with sin, but in the robes of Jesus' righteousness. There we are presented to the court blameless. The accuser of the brethren and any who neglect this great salvation are destroyed in the lake of fire.

As great is this news is, even greater news follows. The gospel is available to all (Q22). God does not want anyone to be lost, and has made every effort to make sure that everyone can be saved. He has stretched out the clock of history so that no one will miss out on the opportunity. Our duty (Q23) is to spread the good word. Christ is waiting with open arms to welcome wandering sinners home.

The gospel is not complex or hidden. It does not require genius IQ for understanding. And it is openly written in letters of blood on the lives of all Christians. We stand as the living message to a dying world. May we live in Christ, so that others will live as well.

How may we summarize the good news? God promised an ultimate victory over sin as soon as man fell into sin (Gen 3:15). The first good news was that in the person of Jesus, God fulfilled his promise. Jesus became our sin-bearer (2 Cor 5:21), and provided the forensic victory. This is good news indeed. But it is not a fully completed promise. The final fulfillment of the promise, and the ultimate good news is elimination of sin when Jesus returns without sin (Heb 9:28) to take us home.

Praise the Lord!