

The gospel is the heart of the Christian message. Literally, "gospel" means "good news." But good news about what?

In the Old Testament, we sense that things are not as they should be. God created a good world; everything was in order as it should have been, ruled by the Sovereign Lord. But our first parents (Adam and Eve) rebelled against God and brought sin and death and corruption into the world by their disobedience. They could no longer stay in communion with God, and their relationship with one another would suffer as well. This is the state all humans find themselves in: They are spiritually dead, unable to do anything to restore their relationship with God, and injustice, fighting, and suffering still marks this world. Humans are characterized by sin.

God would be completely just in punishing all of humanity with eternal damnation because of their rebellion. But God is gracious and made a covenant with Abraham that through his offspring, people would be brought back to a right relationship with him and one another. Their sin would be forgiven, and they would be made righteous. Justice demands, however, that punishment still be granted. This gave way to the sacrificial system, in which priests acted as mediators between the people and God, killing an unblemished animal as a substitute for then people to atone for their sins.

Continuing throughout the Old Testament, we see the history of Abraham's offspring, Israel, God's chosen people. God again made a covenant and through Moses gave Israel his law to bind them together and to him. But following in the footsteps of Adam and Eve, they too rebelled and required a king to be their sovereign. God simply would not do. After one failed king, David rose to the challenge to faithfully lead God's people. As a consequence, God covenanted with him that one of his sons would sit on the throne forever.

The kings that followed, however, led God's people into further sin and rebellion. God, out of his steadfast love, gave his word to prophets who urged the people to return to God or incur his wrath. Failing to listen, God allowed foreign kingdoms to take his people into exile, but again in love, kept them in existence and eventually allowed a remnant to return to their homeland.

Throughout this history, the biblical authors hint at a solution to the problem of sin and death. God's Anointed One - the Messiah or Christ - would save his people from sin. He would be the spotless sacrifice, the perfect priest, the sovereign king, the authoritative prophet. He would be the suffering servant, rejected by his own people. He would be the living water and the root that sustained his chosen ones. Most importantly, this coming figure would be God himself. The previous revelation had only foreshadowed the new covenant to come, but the Jews were left wondering how and when this new covenant would come about.

The gospel is the climax to this narrative. In short, it is this:

God came to earth as Jesus, the Anointed One, fulfilling all that the law and prophets had said concerning him, inaugurating his kingdom. He lived perfectly that he might substitute himself for

us, taking our punishment on the cross and triumphing over death by his resurrection. Not only did he win our justification, making us righteous, but he completely defeated the power sin had become, liberating us from its oppression. Though we had been enemies of God, he gave us life as a consequence of his gracious love, not based on any meritorious works that we might attempt in order to garner God's favor. Through Christ, we have been redeemed and reconciled to God, adopted into his family. Given the righteousness of Christ, we become members of the kingdom of God, free to do the work of the kingdom in restoring all of creation unto God.