

SESSION 2



WALKING THE TALK

Introduction

The idea that there is a particular message that constitutes the ‘good news of Jesus Christ’ becomes clear when we look at how the Bible refers to ‘*the Gospel*’.

In Mark 16:15 Jesus tells us to ‘proclaim *the Gospel*.’ In Galatians 1:6–9 Paul warns us to jealously guard *the Gospel*.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!

Galatians 1:6-9

In Romans 1:16 he reminds us that ‘*The Gospel* is the power of God for Salvation.’ In all these areas Jesus and the apostle Paul are very clearly referring to the ‘words’ of the Gospel, not the ‘works’ or the ‘effects’. Of course, these three things are intrinsically linked. The words of the Gospel *have* effects. Mark makes this clear in chapter 16:20 when he records that, as a result of the disciples’ preaching (i.e. speaking out the Gospel), ‘. . . the Lord worked with them and confirmed His word by the signs that accompanied it.’

May we conclude then that when we’re talking about ‘*the Gospel*’ we’re looking at something that communicates the *message*, the *words*, of Salvation?

Focus

Across denominations, Christians seem to agree that there are several key verses in Scripture that are helpful in explaining the message of Salvation. Paul’s letter to the Romans especially focuses on this question of ‘What must I do to be saved?’ and the Gospel presentation known as *The Roman Road* incisively covers all the key points:

The Roman Road

The Bad News

- The *Problem*: We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (we've all done things wrong). Romans 3:23.
- The *Predicament*: We can't earn our way into heaven. The Bible says no-one is good enough. The standard of heaven is perfection and we all fall short. Romans 4:4–5.
- The *Penalty*: Sin leads to spiritual death and separation from God. Romans 5:12.

The Good News

- The *Provision*: God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to die to pay the 'penalty' that was rightfully ours. Romans 5:8.
- The *Pardon*: The free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23.
- The *Process*: The way to receive the free gift is by confessing with your mouth that 'Jesus is Lord' and believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead. Romans 10:9–10.

Perhaps this kind of illustration is familiar? There are many ways of explaining the message of Salvation, or delivering the *words* of the Gospel. It is, however vital to recognise the difference between the *works*, the *effects* and the *words* of the Gospel.

All three are vital in Christian witness, but alone they are of extremely diminished wealth. James' Epistle is well known for its emphasis on the essentiality of backing up our words with 'works'. As he famously claims '... faith without deeds is dead' (James 2:26). This whole Epistle is a call to action – if you believe, then *do*, wake up and act on it!

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.' (James 1: 22–25).

Discussion

1. What have you found helpful in seeing the *words* of the Gospel presented in this way (within the episode)?
2. Share with your group how the Gospel message was first communicated to you?
3. Discuss the role your church plays in communicating the *words* and *works* of the Gospel. In the context of your church can you differentiate between the two?
4. Consider the role that you play in communicating the *words* and *works* of the Gospel.
5. If a church is fulfilling the Great Commission by implementing a healthy balance of the *words* and *works* of the Gospel, what *effects* would you expect to see? Do you see these effects within your church? If not, why not?

Bible Parallel

Read James 2:14–26

In this passage, James expands on what it truly means to be *hearers* and *doers* of the word, what it means for us to ‘be real’ about our lives. The focus is on how ‘faith’ and ‘works’ relate to all he has said up to this point. James shows us that faith and works are ultimately two sides of the same coin.

Three times in this passage (verses 17, 20, 26) he repeats his thesis ‘faith without works is dead’. In this, James is clearly stating that ‘empty faith’ is not true faith, not saving faith, it is nothing more than mouthing words. James sets out to convey to us that our faith in God and trust in Jesus must work in tandem with our actions. Otherwise, our faith isn’t really faith at all.

Further discussion and personal contemplation

James denies the possibility of having faith without deeds (verse 18). Discuss the significance of backing up our words with works and consider how this enhances our witness to those around us.