

This weekend, we're going to take a one-week break from the Sermon on the Mount...next week we'll be back in Matthew 5, talking about what Jesus had to say about marriage and divorce. But...the Mullenix home got smacked with sickness this week, which kind of put me out for some of the week...so, we're going to go in a different direction...

Tonight, I want to do my very best to explain the heartbeat of Harbor of Hope, which is important that revisit from time to time. You see, whether Harbor is your home church, or you have recently joined us and are looking for a local church to partner with and invest in, you will want to find a church of which you can say, ***"that's my heartbeat too!"***

For almost fifteen years now, we have had one mission and one aim as a church...that is *To Help People Find Their Way Back to God...and to live, love, and give in such a way that we change the world for the glory of Jesus Christ!*

Now...you might be asking, 'why that?' 'How did you arrive at this mission?'

Simple. We believe that it describes the heartbeat and mission of Jesus! In fact, if you want to know what moved Jesus' heart, and how He changed the world, you've got to look at his life and ministry! So that's what we're going to do tonight...

Go to Matthew, chapter 9...

Matthew 9:35 – *"Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness."*

Now...when Matthew writes that Jesus went through the towns and villages **announcing** the Good News about the Kingdom, we've got to stop and ask, what is the Good News?

The phrase 'good news' is actually the word 'gospel.' At the time when Jesus chose this word to describe his central message, the gospel had both a historical and cultural context.

The gospel was ***"news that described an objective, history-changing event that affected everyone's situation."***

Caesar – When Caesar Augustus ascended the throne in Rome, there is a document that reads, *'This is the beginning of the gospel of Caesar.'* Meaning, now that Caesar is king, there is provision and protection for you under his rule!

Marathon – The most famous example comes from 490 BC when the Persians invaded Greece, landing near the plain of Marathon on Greece's Eastern coast. When

the Athenians went out to meet the Persians in battle, against all odds, they prevailed. Now, as legends have it, when the Athenian general saw that victory was at hand, he sent Pheidippides back to Athens with the good news. Pheidippides ran along the coast some 25 miles before descending into the city (which is where we get the modern-day distance for the marathon). When he arrived, he announced, "Rejoice, Good News, We conquer!" Then he fell over dead.

Pheidippides brought gospel to Athens...news of a history-changing event that affected everyone's situation!

Why is this important! Many people today (probably some of us) view Christianity primarily as instruction or advice. As a series of laws or moral teachings to follow! So...if I go to mass, or say my prayers, or participate in certain sacraments and rituals, and if I try very hard to be a good person, then I can have a relationship with God! I'm a Christian!

But the gospel isn't at all about what you must do to get to God. The gospel is Good News about what God has already done, in history, for you!

Genesis 1-2: The Bible tells us that God created a world that was free of suffering, disease, decay and death. And He created us to enjoy his creation and to delight in knowing Him!

Elise: I was driving home with Elise, and we were crossing a bridge just as the sun was setting, and I asked Elise, "**Why did God make the sunset like that?**" "**To light up the sky.**" Yes, you're right, but He also made it that way (pink and purple and perfectly beautiful) so that when you see it, it will fill you with joy, and you'll think of Him, and you'll realize He loves you!

The same is true with work...and with play, and a long walk on a spring day, and a glass of Pinot Grigio, and friendship and romance and marriage and sex with your spouse. God made all of these things and gave them as gifts to you for your enjoyment! He designed them so that your heart would be full of joy and you'd look to Him as the source of those things and worship Him for Who He is!

The problem, if you follow the first chapters of Scripture, is that sin causes us to take creation, and rather than it leading us to worship God and love Him back, we worship creation itself.

We do this with work and money, gifts to be enjoyed and stewarded for God's glory and the good of our neighbors, and we leverage work for our own glory, and we keep our money to ourselves (greed).

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We take romantic relationships and sex, which are very good (last week) when experienced as God designed it, and we turn a young man or woman into a god...we idolize sex and look to it as something I must have to be happy and fulfilled!

We do the same thing with our spouses and our children, all very good gifts from God! But we worship them and say, 'there's nothing that matters to me more this person or these little people!' 'As long as I have them, I'll be happy!'

Sin is essentially the act of placing something else in the position of God in your life! Saying, 'this thing or this person is the most important thing, and as long as I have it, I'll be someone, and my life will be full!' Sin leads us to worship creation instead of God, and the further we move from God in our minds, hearts and actions, the more we feel that we can do without God, and our lives fall apart physically, emotionally, and socially!

Here's the Good News (gospel)! Although God could have moved away from us and started all over, He broke into our world in the person of Jesus Christ to die the death we deserved to die so that we could come back into His arms. By his mercy He forgives us! By his power, He heals us! And now, He is ushering in a Kingdom of peace and justice and love. And one day, Jesus will return to fully and finally do away with decay and death. And all those who trust Jesus will live with Him forever!

This is the gospel that all of Scripture points to and anticipates, and that Jesus came to announce! Now...we might say, *'well that is wonderful...but what does it actually mean for me today?'*

If you look closely at the text, you'll see that Jesus not only announced the Good News, but everywhere He went, He healed people of every kind of disease and illness!

You see...if the Good News is really Good News, then it must not only be announced...it must be applied!

Many Christians have the notion that we respond to the good news of what Jesus has done for us one time. That when needed the gospel when we were very far from God. When things were really bad for us, and our sin was really dark. And of course, this is true. We do need the gospel during these times. But once we come to Jesus, oftentimes we live as if we are to work out the implications of the gospel on our own.

We live as if it's our responsibility to become a better man or woman, or spouse or parent or neighbor. And that it's our job to muster up things like kindness and courage and patience self-control!

Jesus saved me...now it's my responsibility to prove that I was worthy of being saved!

Sermon on the Mount – But if you've been following us the last several weeks as we've walked through the Sermon on the Mount, I've told you each week that in His Sermon, Jesus looks at us and says, *"You will never live the way I created you to live unless you allow me to go deep into your heart, like a surgeon who takes his scalpel deep into the body to remove disease and sickness, Jesus says...I will go deep into your heart to identify sin, to cut it out of your life, and to replace it with my character, my goodness, my peace, my self-control, my gentleness and boldness and compassion..."*

The gospel says that we grow up in Christ by applying the gospel deeper and deeper into our hearts. By setting our minds and over and over again on the beauty of Christ and what He has done for us until it overwhelms us! As the gospel truly becomes GOOD NEWS to your heart, you'll celebrate it...then you'll want to obey God and you'll freely repent of sin (not because you're terrified of what God will do if you don't obey Him, but because you love Him!)

To the degree that you trust in what God has done for you through Jesus and apply it to every area of your life, it will change you!

Now...it starts there, but it doesn't stop there! To be a follower of Jesus is not only to have your heart and entire life changed by Jesus. The moment you become a follower of Jesus, you are sent out on mission!

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.'" Matthew 9:36-38

Compassion – The word 'compassion' means 'to be gripped in the gut.' Jesus was overcome with emotion for those far from God. So...he called his disciples together, and in chapter 10, Jesus sent them out to announce the Good News!

When God calls you in, He will always send you out! In the periods of history where the church has been most effective, Christians have understood this!

Up until 300AD, the church grew by 40% every decade because Christians understood that they were sent out into their towns and villages to live and love in such a radical way among family and neighbors.

In the book, *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark writes about this: "To cities filled with homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity

as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services."

Church History – Now...maybe you're asking, *What happened?* Why does the church today seem to be less contagious and more marginalized? **Let me briefly explain.** Until 300 AD, followers of Jesus understood that the church, which comes from the Greek Word, *ekklesia*, simply meant, "*a gathering of people united by a common identity and purpose.*" The early church was united by one thing! A love for Jesus and desire to change the world in His name!

Constantine: In the early 4th century, the emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire, which meant that followers of Jesus experienced religious freedom instead of persecution. Constantine eventually became a Christian, and declared Christianity the official religion of Rome, and in a short time, Roman culture, with its high esteem for architecture and pageantry and hierarchy, began to shape the church.

Within a decade, the *ekklesia* ceased to be an expanding group of people sharing a unique identity and purpose. Instead, it became a location...and the Romans called these gathering places *basilicas*, the Latin word used to identify a public building or official meeting place. Gothic cultures used the word *kirika*, which became *kirche* in modern German. The word meant "house of the lord," and referred to any ritual gathering place, Christian or pagan.

In his book, *Deep and Wide*, author Andy Stanley writes that this Germanic term became the one used most often to refer to the *ekklesia* of Jesus, and from it we get the word *church*. The Greek word *ekklesia* and the German word *kirche* refer to two very different ideas.

"This shift in vocabulary signaled a dramatic shift in emphasis and direction. The church was no longer a grassroots movement built upon the simple understanding of who Jesus is. The church became synonymous with a location...what began as a movement, dedicated to carrying the truth of Jesus Christ to every corner of the world, had become an insider-focused, hierarchical, ritualized institution that bore little resemblance to its origins."
Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide*

Personal Exercise – If you want to know how deeply this affects the way you see the church, consider the language we use. We say things like, "*I'm going to church this weekend. Or, I haven't been to church in a long time. Or, I really don't care for*

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church that much...it's boring and irrelevant." Our language shows that we see the church primarily as a place instead of a people! **And history shows us that the moment the church ceases to be a movement and becomes an institution, it loses its identity and potential to change the world!**

However...when you see that to be a follower of Jesus is to be called into an *ekklesia*. A gathering of people committed to loving Jesus, serving one another, and furthering the mission of Jesus by *Helping People Find Their Way Back to God*...

Then...we don't go to church.
We are the church

We don't leave the church (when we walk outside)

We walk out of these doors with a God-given calling to live out the gospel! To live with a sincere compassion for our neighbors and friends. To be open-handed with our lives! To give away our resources and time in radically generous ways! So that people can see the greatness of Christ and turn to Him.

Now...if we are to become a people committed to *Helping People Find Their Way Back to God*, the gospel must become so real to our hearts, that we are willing to live it out practically and radically!

The Apostle Paul explained it this way (this is the verse out of which Harbor's mission comes...)

"So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!' For God made Christ who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:20-21

Gospel – Do you see what Paul writes about how far Jesus went to help you find your way back to God? Jesus was the perfect, sinless Son of God! And he became an offering! In the Old Testament, a sin offering was a sacrifice (usually a lamb) that was given in the place of the sinner. The offering always died so that the sinner could live! The offering endured the penalty that the sinner deserved so that the sinner could walk free!

When you and I were far from God, Jesus loved us, and He came for us. Jesus Christ became a sin offering and He died in your place so that you could walk free, fully forgiven and healed! Jesus endured your penalty...He was stripped, beaten and killed so that you could be made right with God!

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As you set your heart on this truth over and over, something in your heart will change. Where my heart was once cold and untouched, a small flame has started to grow! Not because I manipulated my own heart...but because the beauty of Christ crucified for me is changing me!

The deeper the gospel goes, the greater its effect! If we are to share Jesus' heart, we must first see His heart!

As we close, let me ask you two questions...in application!

Application #1 – Have you responded to the gospel personally?

Have you ever prayed something like this! *“Father...please accept me on the basis of what Jesus did for me.” My sin is real...I've walked away from you...I've taken the gifts you've given me...and I've turned them into gods and worshiped them, and I know I don't deserve the chance to stand in your presence. But I believe that your gospel is real too! That Jesus, the sinless Son of God lived a perfect life and died in my place so that I could be free! So, Father, please accept me on the basis of what Jesus did for me?*

Have you repented of your sin? (Gotten honest about it...)

Have you publicly confessed your faith in Christ? How?

God has given us a gift to help us do just that!

Baptism Celebration – In a couple of weeks...a party unlike any party you've attended!

Baptism is a celebration of our union with Jesus. It's a moment in a Christian's life when he or she says, *“God...I was lost, you found me, you covered my with your mercy and forgiveness, and I place the trust of my heart in you!”*

When a person is baptized, they are saying two things...

I need you – I need you to be the Savior of my life! I place my trust in your death...for the forgiveness of my sins...and in your resurrection...for the hope that I have in you (changed life).

I want you – I want you to be the king of my life! From this day on...my life belongs to you...all of it!

Have you personally responded to the gospel through baptism? If not...why not? To respond to Jesus in faith, yet to never be baptized is like getting

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married, but never having a wedding ceremony! Baptism is the public celebration of our union with Christ!

Application #2 – Are you living out the gospel practically?

Imagine what would happen if each of us were committed to *HPFTWBTG*.

What if each of us were committed to *Helping One Person!*

Praying (Asking God to give us His heart for them!)

Encouraging a Neighbor

Serving a Colleague

Sharing our Lives with a Friend –

Inviting (to read Scripture, to join you here)

(Sharing our Story – This is what Jesus has done for me)

If you are in Christ, you have been uniquely gifted and positioned to help someone in a way that only you can. A family member that I'll never know. A colleague I'll never be able to help. A neighbor that I'll never relate to...

Who is it for you? Who is it that you're asking God to give you his heart for? Who is it that you're pleading for?

When people look at your life...do they see you and question what it is about you that makes you live the way you do? Is the gospel changing you that deeply? That practically?

I pray that it is...

Close

Prayer