



5: The Gospel Is Powerful Good News

Just 20 years after Jesus ascended to heaven churches had been planted and were thriving in every key position across the eastern part of the Roman Empire — Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, Rome and many other places. What is the explanation for that success?

Well, of course it was the power of the Holy Spirit: nothing else can explain it. But, from the human point of view, was there a strategy? Did Paul have a method? The answer is yes, Paul did have a method.

The Gospel Was The Method

"With the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel."
1 Thessalonians 2:2

"Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel."
1 Corinthians 1:17

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."
Galatians 1:8

"As much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."
Romans 1:15

Everywhere Paul went he had one task in mind and that was to preach the gospel. He was obsessed with the gospel. Preaching the gospel was his passion. He preached the gospel and only the gospel.

So far we have learned that the gospel is good news: a simple message.

- There is a God and we are accountable to Him.
- We have sinned and we deserve God's judgement.
- By God's grace we can be saved by Jesus.
- Salvation is open to anyone who trusts Him.

Simple but profound. Profound because although it starts with that simple message, the more you think the more you realise just how extensive the good news is: its implications are vast; it could take forever to plumb its depths. The gospel is a treasure chest; the whole Bible explains and applies it.

But Paul says the gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. It doesn't make sense to them.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing"
1 Corinthians 1:18

What do you think Paul means when he says the message of the cross is foolishness?

Why do you think the gospel seems like foolishness to those who are perishing?

How Does It Work?

If those who are not saved think the gospel is foolishness, how can it work? Surely no one would pay any heed to it.

"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

1 Corinthians 1:18

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Romans 1:16

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

1 Corinthians 2:14

"Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 1:5

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus"

1 Corinthians 1:30

When the good news is told, God's Spirit enters the hearts of those who will be saved, opens their eyes, unstops their ears, gives them willing hearts, grants them faith to believe and grace to repent. It's a miracle: the miracle of the new birth: a miracle the Holy Spirit chooses to perform when the gospel is told. That is why the gospel is powerful. When you tell the gospel you wield the power of God Himself for the salvation of souls for it is through the telling of the gospel that God has chosen to exert His infinite power to work the miracle of the new birth.

- Power that is stronger than any other.
- The power that made and keeps the world in existence.
- Irresistible power.
- Power that cannot be defeated by any argument.
- Power that can break the hardest heart of the most wicked sinner.

That is the power of the gospel.

What are the implications of this thought?

We cannot explain how the miracle of the new birth takes place. When Nicodemus asked Jesus to explain it this is the answer he was given.

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

John 3:8

What did Jesus mean?

An Illustration

We do have many examples of the miracle of the new birth in the Bible. One of the most striking comes in Luke's account of the crucifixion. As Jesus hung on the cross there was absolutely nothing convincing about Him to give credence to His claim to be the Messiah. Naked, bleeding, scorned, ridiculed, an object of shame yet one thief — most likely a Zealot who looked for a conquering Messiah who would overthrow Rome by force — recognised Jesus as his King, reached out to Him for grace and was saved. The only explanation for that can be the power of God at work in his soul.

Can you think of any other examples from the Bible, or even from personal experience, that demonstrate the miraculous nature of the new birth?

Sleep Easy

About 1 year before Jesus was crucified thousands, attracted by His miracles and enthralled by His power were flocking to Him but very few — a mere handful — became true believers. What was wrong? Where was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies? Where was the national repentance? Our response would probably have been, "We need a different strategy." Jesus told a parable

"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head."

Mark 4:26 – 28

What is the point of this parable?

Have Confidence

The gospel is the message Jesus commanded His disciples to take to the world. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Have confidence in it. Don't feel you need to improve it. Don't dare to change it. Don't dare to add to it

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

Galatians 1:8

When Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." or in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "But to us who are being saved it is the power of God." what do you think is the significance of the words "to everyone who believes" and "to us who are being saved"?