

“Joy Ride: Joy in the Gospel”



I hadn't done very many funerals when I got the call that Marion had died. I knew that it was my job to take her life story and lay it alongside the gospel story, but I also knew that most people today don't really care, or at least think very much about the gospel in their everyday lives.

For many people, the sound of the gospel being communicated at a funeral can sound kind of “preachy,” and they'd rather I not be preachy!

But when I met with Marion's husband he surprised me with his request. I asked all the usual questions that I ask when meeting with a family of someone who has died. “What were some of the important details of her life?” “What will you miss most?” “What difference did she make in your life?”



At the end of our meeting I asked if there was anything else I should know. The husband turned to me and said, “Will you preach the gospel?” “I'm sorry?” I said. He explained, “My wife was a faithful person, and throughout her illness we put our faith in the truth of the gospel. So, at the funeral, I want you to preach the good news of gospel.”

I wonder, could you, in a few sentences sum up the heart of the Christian faith? Could you state what Jesus means in your life? And, what difference does your faith make in how you live day to day?



So far in the first chapter of the letter to the Philippian church, Paul has told his friends that he may or may not ever see them again, but even so, that he is able to rejoice amid his challenges on account of the gospel. But now he turns from his own circumstance, to offer his flock some instruction.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”
- Philippians 1:27

He writes, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

What’s the gospel?



Timothy Keller, an author and church planter in New York City has written his manifesto called “Center Church.” And in it, he argues that faithful and fruitful churches are churches centered on one thing; the gospel.



He goes on to say, “The gospel is not about something we do but about what has been done for us, and yet the gospel results in a whole new way of life.”



I was interested to see that the cover story of the July issue of Maclean’s magazine was entitled, “Join the Compassion Revolution (Or we’re all doomed).” The article outlines the data for a culture that is becoming increasingly less compassionate and less empathetic. Despite all the talk of tolerance and love these days, the reality is that our world is seeing a rise in isolationism, tribalism, racism and authoritarianism.

“Forty years of neo-liberal, free market policies has created widening inequalities, falling incomes and a sense of desperation.”
- MacLean's July 2019

The article says, “Forty years of neo-liberal, free market policies has created widening inequalities, falling incomes and a sense of desperation.” And as a result, says neuroscientist James Doty, the lack of compassion is resulting in epidemic levels of stress, anxiety, depression, bullying, crime, growing wealth and health inequality.

The British government is currently considering legislation to make compassion a legal requirement. They’re toying with something called a “compassion threshold.”

Other’s argue that there is in fact a lot of good selfish reasons to be kind. We know that those who are, are more self-

empowered, happier, less lonely, and less prone to anxiety and depression. So, maybe we should just appeal to those reasons to make our society more compassionate. But then, we know lots of things are good for us, but we still don't do them...



But what if the answer isn't ultimately to be found in the laws we create or in what we know about the science of compassion. What if the answer is found in what we believe; what we believe about the very nature of the universe. What if how we understand God causes us to live in love and compassion toward those who are different from us?

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."
- Philippians 1:27

Maybe that's why Paul exhorts, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."

The Gospel has Chapters

CHAPTERS	GOSPEL NARRATIVE	GOSPEL TRUTHS
Chapter 1	Where did we come from?	From God: the one and the eternal
Chapter 2	Why did things go so wrong?	Because of sin: bondage and condemnation
Chapter 3	What will put things right?	Christ: incarnation, substitution, resurrection
Chapter 4	How can I be put right?	Through faith: grace and hope

Keller argues that the gospel is not a simple thing, the narrative has multiple chapters. The first chapter answers the question, "Where did we come from." We came from God: the one God who is also a relational God. The second chapter of the gospel answers the question, "Why did things go so wrong?"

Because of sin: bondage and condemnation. The third chapter answers, "What will put things right?" Christ, through his incarnation, through his substitution and through his restoration. And finally, the fourth chapter of the gospel asks, "How can I be put right?" The answer, simply through faith – by trusting in God's grace to do what you cannot do for yourself.

You see, how we understand the nature of the universe affects how we see ourselves. Because if the dominant narrative that "life is short and so enjoy it while it lasts," well, there's no real need to live compassionately. The goal is simply to maximize personal pleasure and minimize personal suffering; a way of living that naturally results in a compassionless society.

But if it's not true – if we are in fact eternal beings designed to live in love with our creator and one another – then a whole different way of being is not only possible, but actually quite rational.

The Gospel:

1. The gospel is good news, not good advice.
2. The gospel is news announcing that we have been rescued or saved.
3. The gospel is news about what has been done by Jesus Christ to put right our relationship with God.

So, what's the gospel? Well, here's how Keller puts it:

1. **The gospel is good news, not good advice.** It's not a way of life, it's not something we do, it's not a philosophy for living, but it's something that has been done for us and something that we must respond to.
2. **The gospel is news announcing that we have been rescued or saved.** We are naturally out of fellowship with God, and as a result we are psychologically, socially and physically alienated and broken.
3. **The gospel is news about what has been done by Jesus Christ to put right our relationship with God back to rights.** Jesus takes the brokenness which is like a disease we all have, and which cripples us and ultimately will kill us, and he takes all the consequences upon himself, setting us free to find healing and wholeness and life everlasting.

It's profoundly unpopular today to talk about sin today. It's even more unpopular to talk about sin at a funeral. But at Marion's funeral, I was given permission by her husband, to tell the truth. Marion had a curse, the same curse you and I have. But since she trusted in Jesus, God, by his love and power, has saved her.

Marion couldn't save herself, despite all her good deeds. And she was a lovely woman. You would've liked her. But, the curse was too strong. So, Jesus, took upon himself the full brunt of her brokenness, so that she could sing, 'When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.'

These were happy times in Wilberforce's life. But when he was twelve-years-old, his mother and grandmother learned about the methodism of his aunt and uncle. For them, it was a nightmare situation! His grandfather warned, "If little Billy turns Methodist he'll not see a penny of mine." Everything was at stake, so his mother raced the many miles to rescue her son from the clutches of these pious fanatics.

But the damage was done. By then, the twelve-year-old's faith was quite sincere, and he bravely clung to it once back in the safety of his home environment.

However, during his years studying at Cambridge, he drifted from his faith. He came to embrace the more culturally acceptable aloofness and skepticism toward religion.

At this same time, Wilberforce began attending debates in Parliament. Fascinated by the shifting political landscape of the time, he decided this was his calling.



hand man.

Following graduation, Wilberforce accompanied by his best friend, William Pitt, were elected to Parliament, and they quickly climbed the political ladder, gaining notoriety and power. Pitt eventually became Prime Minister, and Wilberforce was his right-



who holds this teaching position is one of the smartest people on the planet.

One year, while on vacation, Wilberforce found himself in the company of an old friend, Isaac Milner, who was a professor at Cambridge, in a position once held by Isaac Newton and more recently held by Stephen Hawking. It's often said that the person

During their travels, Milner brought up a certain Methodist pastor, known to both men. Wilberforce offhandedly remarked that the man in question, "Took things a bit too far." Like

everyone in those circles, Wilberforce thought that anyone who took God seriously went too far, but Milner did not agree.

As they travelled together across the countryside Wilberforce discovered to his horror, that his travelling companion, genius though he was, was also a closet Methodist. What ensued was a serious theological discussion, which resulted in Wilberforce questioning his shallow agnostic views. Wilberforce lost the debate.

He now needed to contend with the reality that he was wrong, and the gospel of Jesus Christ was quite true. Upon his return from vacation, Wilberforce contacted an old friend, John Newton – who was a former slave trader turned Methodist preacher.

Wilberforce feared that he might need to leave politics as a result of his renewed faith. But Newton argued just the opposite. He argued his life had been in preparation “for such a time as this.”

“God almighty, has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners.”

- William Wilberforce

Wilberforce would later write in his diary, “God almighty, has set before me two great objects: the suppression of the Slave Trade and the Reformation of Manners.”



By this, he meant that British culture did not have a biblical worldview regarding human beings as being made in the image of God and worthy of dignity and respect. This unbiblical view led to every kind of evil in British society, including the slave trade. But also, child labor, alcoholism, sex-trafficking, extreme animal cruelty and public hangings. In other words, Wilberforce’s conversion in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, resulted in a whole new way of looking at everything. Wilberforce would, against all odds, go on to abolish the slave trade in Great Britain.

“Whatever happens,
conduct yourselves in a
manner worthy of the
gospel of Christ.”

- Philippians 1:27

This morning the Apostle Paul exhorts, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.” In other words, see the world differently. See it through the eyes of God, who sacrificed himself that we “might have life and have it abundantly.”

I wonder, when the day comes, what will the preacher say about you? Will they tell your story and proclaim how you saved yourself by living a good and virtuous life? Or, will they tell the truth, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” Will the details of your life, your challenges, your successes, your loves and your losses be evidence of a much bigger story – the story of God at work in you?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth about how the world really works. And in light of the truth, we discover that real joy comes from serving one another in the way of Christ.

Thanks be to God, Amen.