

**Series: THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED - March 20, 2011**

**GOOD NEWS...OR GOOD ADVICE?  
Mark 1:1, Gal. 1:6-9**

1. Has anyone here ever made a really stupid decision, or done something really dumb—or even moderately dumb—or felt stupid...and trapped? I've told you about my experience, I think. While we were visiting Lori's parents in Pennsylvania, I was on my way to a friend's place—slid on some gravel—and slammed right into a guardrail. And there we were--stuck in Punxsutawney with no car.

-I was upset, embarrassed--and didn't know what to do. When my father-in-law found out what happened, he did something I will never, **ever** forget. He didn't chew me out; he handed me a check to get the car repaired. And then my Dad loaned me his monstrous Oldsmobile to drive until it was finished.

-Now, here's my question for you: Was my father-in-law's response **Good Advice**—or **Good News**? Good advice would've been more like, "Here are ten tips for driving on gravel and avoiding guardrails." Or, "How to fix your own car on a non-existent budget with wire and duct tape." Or, "How to hitch a ride to Canada without getting killed." **Good News** is, "I know you feel really stupid, but I'm going to take care of this—just because I love you. **Actually**, I love my daughter—and feel bad that she married an idiot!"

- a. In our world, a lot of people say **nice** things about Jesus. "He was an **amazing** teacher! I mean, that **Do unto others as you would have them do unto you!** thing was incredible! And the **Judge not!** thing? I **like** that! The story of the Good Samaritan—this world would be a better place if we just followed his teaching!"

-And that brings up a question that lies at the core of everything that Jesus was about: Was His coming, life, and teaching about **Good News...or Good Advice**? It's important to know--because they are **very** different.

- b. Now, this is what the Bible says in Mark, which is probably the first book written about Jesus life:

**This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.  
(Mark 1:1 NLT)**

-So, what does Mark do from this point on? Well, he tells the story of Jesus; about his coming, his works, his teaching, his death, and his resurrection. How many of you have ever heard the word **Gospel**? It literally means, **Good News**. The Roman Emperors used that phrase to describe announcements of new conquests, the birth of royalty, new policies. "**Good News!** Your emperor is looking out for **you!**"

-The story of Jesus, His coming, His teaching, the forgiveness He made possible with his death; His defeat of Satan and death through His resurrection-

-it's all the announcement of **Good News**. Good advice is about what **you** have to do to get what you want or need; Good News is what has been done **for** you.

-The records of Jesus' life—God's intervention on our behalf—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—are all called **Gospels** or **The Good News**. The Gospel message is the **story of Jesus**—why He came, what He accomplished, and what He's up to.

- c. There are at least two mistakes that have been made down through the years. The first is **minimizing** the Gospel. Sometimes followers of Jesus have made the Good News **way** too limited. This happens when the most incredible news on the planet of God's invasion and pursuit of us is wrapped up in a Gospel sound bite. "If you believe that Jesus is God's Son, that He paid for your sins on a cross, and if you will ask Him to forgive your sins—and receive Him as your Saviour, you will be forgiven and go to Heaven when you die."

-Now—is that **true?** Of course it's true—but the Gospel—the **Good News** of Jesus is way bigger than that. It is the entire story of how, in Jesus, God has entered this world system to show us who He is, to deal once and for all with the problem of sin, to establish His Kingdom/His leadership and, finally, to replace religion with Himself.

- d. There's second danger followers of Jesus have faced through the years; it's where people erect some other religious system that is **different** from the Good News—but uses Jesus as their "mascot."

-And this is usually some form of the **Jesus and...** approach. Yes, believe in Jesus—**and** be circumcised and follow the Jewish law. Or, belief in Jesus **and** these extra revelations given to Joseph Smith or whoever. Or..."Believe in Jesus **and** become one with the divine through the special knowledge I'm about to give you." Listen to what Paul says:

**I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is *not the Good News* at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed. (Galatians 1:6-9 NLT)**

-It makes you want to ask, "So, Paul...how do you **really** feel about this?" The Good News of Jesus was apparently not open for revision—or additions!

2. Here's where I'm going with this. The Good News of Jesus, friends, is the climax of the Mission of God as it's revealed in the Bible. The **Good News** is at the core of **everything** God is up to in reclaiming all He's made. The **Good News** is climax of the

story of God—and what He’s up to in every square inch of this planet and every person on it. How many of you think it would be good if we get the Gospel—the **Good News** right!

-What I’d like to do is describe the breadth of the Gospel from four different perspectives. These, by the way, aren’t original with me. These four perspectives comes directly from Bruxy Cavey, Teaching Pastor at The Meeting House. So, here goes:

**The Gospel is the Good News that God is pursuing us through Christ to...**

**\*SHOW US His love**

**\*SAVE US from sin**

**\*SET UP His Kingdom**

**\*SHUT DOWN religion**

-First—remember--it’s **GOOD** News. The overall encounter that people have with the message of Jesus should be that it’s **Good** News. Now, the problem that God has come to earth to deal with is **not** a good one. And of course, the driving force behind the mess we find ourselves in is sin. **Sin** is not a pleasant subject to talk about, is it? I mean, talking about **other’s** sin is kinda fun—but let’s not talk about **mine!** Think of it in terms of cancer. Someone comes up to you and says, “I’ve got **Good News!** We have found a cure for your cancer!”—and you don’t know that you **have** cancer! That **is** Good News—but it wouldn’t feel like it.

-Now, here’s the deal. Have you ever heard someone trying to **convince** someone that they have a sin problem and need Jesus? “You **must** have a sense of the meaninglessness and emptiness of your life...!” Want to know why that rarely works?

**That’s not our job!** It belongs to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that ...**He will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment.** (John 16:8 NLT)

-Finally—Jesus’ coming and work is Good **News** not Good **Advice**. The way of religion is **Good Advice**: The Ten Steps...the Eightfold Path, the Five Pillars...the Traditions and Sacraments. If you already have cancer—good advice about cancer prevention is a little late. You need **Good News!** We have a cure—you’re going to live and play with your great-grandkids!

-The message of Jesus is front end loaded about what **God** has done to save us and rescue us. God achieves it **for** you. When you hear the Good News—and receive the **gift** of life—the good that comes from your life is not an attempt to earn God’s favour—but a gift of gratitude and love for the gift of His Son. This is the **opposite** of religion. Paul, an early leader in the church says it like this:

**God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT)**

- a. Now, here's the deal—and this is **so** important to get. People generally think that **they** have to pursue God and do enough stuff to convince Him to answer their prayers and take them to Heaven. The **Good News** is, above all, how God chases **us** down; not to beat us up for the bad things we've done—but to show us His love.

-Until Christ showed up, **love** was not usually the first word people thought of when God's Name came up in a conversation. **Fear** and **Respect**—yes! Power? **Definitely**. But there was the sense that because **we** were the ones who had sinned and screwed up our lives, **we** needed to close the distance between us and God.

- b. But instead, God makes this **astounding** move. He wants us back. He wants everyone to come to Him and be reclaimed. So, as Paul says to the Roman Church:

**But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8 NLT)**

-Jesus, in explaining this new way of life to a religious leader named Nicodemus, said:

**“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17 NLT)**

- c. Now, do you see how this fits together? God's mission, ever since the rebellion of humankind, was to reclaim his people and his planet—to **reconcile** the broken relationship between us and Him. All through Abraham and Moses and Israel's history and the prophets He had been preparing a way for that to happen.

-Through the law, it was clear how far we'd gone—and how impossible it was to make our own way back. When people took a lamb to the temple, laid their hands on it, and it was killed before their eyes—it was clear that this innocent, helpless animal was paying for what **they** had done. Through David, it becomes clear what it's like to have a godly leader. The prophets keep saying how this Servant, this Messiah, will make a new way--that He will suffer, that He will deal with sin, that He will reveal God's love and lead God's people as the **Good Shepherd**.

-And then **Jesus** comes—and through his life, teaching, death, and resurrection—it slowly becomes clear. **We have seen God! And God is LOVE!** Because He's just and righteous—all the mess and suffering sin has caused must be judged. So **He** shows up. **He** pursues us. **He** dies for the mess **we** created. **He** rises again and defeats death and Satan.

- d. See, no one expected that God would look like this—until Jesus came. People saw God as someone with lightning bolts in his hands, a frown on his face, ready to skewer the really **bad** people in the world. Not **us** of course—but the other **really** bad people! But Jesus is **way** different than anyone expected.

\*He touches everyone—whoever comes. He spends time with—eats meals with those the religious types hated and avoided.

\*In his last evening with his disciples—we see this astounding picture of humility and love—on his hands and knees in his underwear—washing his disciple’s feet.

-And suddenly it becomes clear—and you see it all through the New Testament—God calls **us** to love—because He is loving to the core. Love doesn’t remove our respect for God—but it **does** replace our fear. Jesus said, “Come close to the Father—call Him, **Abba**—Aramaic for **Dad**.” You don’t call just anyone, Dad, do you? **The Gospel is the Good News that God is pursuing us...to SHOW US HIS LOVE.**

3. The major barrier between us and knowing, feeling, and experiencing God’s love would be...sin. **The Gospel is the Good News that God is pursuing us to SAVE US FROM OUR SIN.** Why? What’s the big deal with sin? Well, sin—rebellion against God—is what put everything—including us-- into this death spiral.

-I read a book years ago by a secular Psychiatrist, Karl Menninger—**What Ever Happened to Sin?** **Sin** sounds so—archaic. So—religious. So—harsh. We’re rather call it, **mistakes**. We don’t lie—we—**mis-speak**. We don’t steal we—**borrow**. We don’t commit adultery—we **fool around**. But Jesus—the one who paid for this stuff with his blood—uses the ugly word for it; **sin**. Know why? Because that’s what it is.

-**Good advice**—in the arena of sin—implies that sin is a **knowledge** problem; that if we only had better strategies and understanding of our problems and modifying our behaviour, we would be able to just eliminate evil from our lives. Good advice is more prevalent and accessible than it has **ever** been. Is it **helping?** In some cases—of course—it does. But when it comes to the **core issue** in our hearts that drives the whole mess—no, good advice doesn’t cut it.

- a. The issue is that sin always leaves damage in its wake—damage that many times can’t be undone. Wreck a car—and you can fix it or replace it; but if you scar someone’s soul—the damage is done. Let’s just be honest about this and not wall-paper over it, okay? Sin hurts us. It creates guilt and shame; it twists our desires in the wrong way, and wrecks our opportunities. Sin is a shortcut that damages what we want most—hope, joy, peace—and loving, respect-filled relationships with others.

-Good advice can help you **stay** out of trouble—but it has absolutely **no** power to deal with the damage that’s already been done.

- b. We live in lives—and on a planet—staggering under the weight of sin. An angel told Jesus’ step-dad what to name Him.

**“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17 NLT)**

-Now, we name our kids—whatever. I was named after my Uncle Kenny Williams. The name Yeshua—Joshua--**Jesus** was supernaturally chosen; Jesus’ **core** identity was—**Saviour**. Jesus came to deal with the core issue of **everything** that’s wrong in us and in this universe. Band-aids wouldn’t do. It would take a **Saviour**.

-And the **Good News** is that God drove a stake in the world with his Son nailed to it to end the sin problem, to offer every single person grace and forgiveness—and the **power to change!** But it was even bigger than that; Jesus’ death and resurrection defeated the powers of darkness that **drive** evil.

- c. I’m going to speak to this more in the coming weeks, but God’s offer of forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration **paid in full**—by the death of His Son—is **Astoundingly Good News!**

\*Our past can be wiped clean. Because of grace, our status changes; we become children of God—which means that our future is secure. And in the present—because of the Spirit of God living in us, we have the inner strength to say **No!** to temptation—the power to change. The Bible simply calls it **GRACE!** Because of Jesus we receive what we don’t deserve!

- d. There are a lot of mistaken notions that surround the Bible’s teaching that Christ came to save us from our sin.

\*The first is that **other** people—bad people—people who are worse than me—need this. “I’m not **that** bad!” It’s a little like two murderers arguing, “But I only killed 3 people—you killed **10!**” John, an early leader and writer says in his book:

**If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. (1 John 1:8-10 NIV)**

\*Another mistake is to think that the word **save** only means to forgive us and keep us from the eternal consequences of sin. It **does** mean that—but it also means that God, through Christ, wants to free us from the slavery and craziness of sinful thoughts and behaviour that sabotages us.

\*The third mistaken idea is that being ***saved from sin*** is primarily for individuals. The truth is the sin has infested every organization, every family, every part of creation—***everything***. And God’s plan, through Christ, is to ultimately clean up the entire mess that sin has made. How many of you think that’s ***Good News?!***

4. The Gospel is the Good News that God is pursuing us through Christ to **show us his love, save us from sin**, and, third, **SET UP HIS KINGDOM**. If you’re remember from last week, God’s Kingdom is...**the range of His effective will; it’s the realm where things are the way HE wants them to be.**

-Question: In a kingdom, who gives leadership and lays out how things will be done? This is not a trick question—it’s a **KING**-dom. There are ultimately two kingdoms in this world—according to the Bible. There is **God’s Kingdom**—and then everything else, called the Kingdom of darkness.

-The point of what God has done and is doing—is not just that we pretty much do life as normal—until we get scooped off the planet. The **Kingdom** is short form for God’s new way of living here on earth. It’s what Jesus laid out in his best known message. We live out our lives in the context of loving God and loving others.

-Our relationships are totally re-oriented—which **changes** how we deal with our anger, lust, self-righteousness. It changes our relational world—how we treat enemies; how we treat marriage; how we forgive and who we love. It even gets into the nitty-gritty of worry, compassion, keeping promises, and passing judgment. This new value system flips the world system upside down.

-See, that’s what was so **powerful** about the influence the Early Church had. How they lived was a **proclamation** of how the Good News transforms a person’s value system—how they love and value others—and how that can be seen in how they love, help, accept, value and are generous with others. How all the wall created by gender, social status, money and race are dismantled by the Good News.

-And this Kingdom, as Jesus said, spreads quietly, under the surface—like yeast in a blob of dough; like tiny, barely noticeable seeds sprouting and growing into trees. And this Kingdom ultimately has a sorting effect; that is, it becomes clear, over time, who’s real and who’s pretending. Who just **talks** about it—and who **lives** it.

5. The fourth and final piece—and perhaps the most shocking—is this: **The Gospel is the Good News that God is pursuing us through Christ to SHUT DOWN RELIGION**. Jesus **replaced** religion with Himself. Religion is us trying to move closer to God; the Good News is that God has, in Christ, moved toward us. We have the forgiveness—the status—that religion is powerless to give. This Good News makes religion—**all religion**—redundant.

-When Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples—and instituted what we now know as Communion or the Eucharist—He told them, **This cup is a New Covenant in my blood**. That’s why we have the **New Testament**. That’s why the author of the Book of Hebrews writes these words:

**By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:13 NLT)**

-Here’s the bottom line: What Jesus did on the cross was the **final sacrifice** to shut down religion—for good. And this is not just the Jewish religion—this has huge implications for **all** religions! That would include the religion followers of Jesus have sometimes turned Christianity into.

- a. And that brings us to the core message: Religion—**every** religion—is **good advice**. Good advice can honestly help you to live a better, more healthy life. Good advice can sometimes help you make good choices and treat people fairly and be successful in a lot of ways. But it’s different than **Good News**. **Good advice** tells you what to **do**; **Good News** tells you what has been **done** for you.

-Because what God has done through Jesus is Good News—history matters. That’s why the historical record of Jesus’ coming, his life, his miracles, his death, his resurrection is critical. Whether or not the Good News of Jesus is true has a **profound** impact on whether or not God’s love has been shown; on whether or not we have been saved from our sin; whether or not there is a new kingdom counterculture going on under the surface of everything—and whether or not being religious is important.

-I want to make a statement here—realizing that I **could** be misunderstood. This historical record of Mohammed or Buddha or Krishna and what they did—and whether or not they performed miracles doesn’t really matter. Why? Because you’re not saved by what they **did**; according to the religions they founded, you’re saved by doing what they said to do. The Good News of Jesus is that something happened in history that split it in half and changed it forever—and transforms the lives of those who believe in **Him**. In every other religion, you’re saved by the **teaching** of the founder. Here—you’re saved **by** the founder!

- b. We live in a world that is **sick and tired** of religion. Any of you have Moms that used that phrase, “I’m **sick and tired...!**” Well, that’s literally true with religion. It makes people **sick**. It’s sending people in the wrong directions, it’s making their souls and spirits sick. Why? Because God shut it down and replaced it with His Son! And people are **tired**. They were tired in Jesus’ day. He said to them one day:

**"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."**  
(Matthew 11:28-30 MSG)

7. There’s a story tucked away in the Old Testament that I think fits this whole concept of **Good News**. It was around 850 B.C. Times were desperate. The entire army from

the country of Aram had been amassed against Samaria--the capital city of Northern Israel—and ***laid siege*** to it. The intent was to surround a city and starve the people into desperation. And that's what happened; things got so bad that a donkey's head sold for an outrageous sum of money—and people were even buying and eating dove excrement. In one instance, two prostitutes made a deal to resort to cannibalism—with their babies. It was ***horrible***.

-Outside the city walls, four lepers had their own problems. Not only were they dying of hunger—they had been quarantined from the city. So. They make a desperate decision to hand themselves over to the foreign army. They thought, “Hey, we're going to die anyway—***what do we possibly have to lose! Maybe they'll feed us!***”

-The strange thing is that when they approached the small tent city this foreign army had set up—it quiet in a weird sort of way. They eventually realized that God had apparently intervened, scared these troops half to death. The entire army had run off—leaving everything--***everything*** behind. Clothes, money, weapons—and ***food!*** A massive supply. Well, when these four lepers realize their incredible fortune—they just go crazy. They laugh, stuff themselves, dress up, go from tent to tent taking gold, clothes, food. And then the thought crosses their mind. Let me read it for you:

**Then they said to each other, “What we're doing is not right. *This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace.*” (2 Kings 7:9 NIV)**

-The story ends with these four lepers—people no one would touch—or wanted to be around—being heroes. They didn't have good advice. All they had was—***Good News***—news, for starving people, about more food than any of them had ***ever*** seen. To keep Good News to themselves was to make themselves liable for the lives of desperate people. Good news ***this*** big—demands to be shared!

-We have to remember our heritage, friends. Jesus came to bring the ***Good News*** of the Kingdom. That the God of the universe is, of all things, ***pursuing us through Christ***. He wants to show everyone His love; He wants to save ***every last one of us*** from our sin; He wants to set up His Kingdom—and infiltrate every arena with His ways; and He wants to shut down religion. You could put it like this:

**Because of Jesus, I can rest, knowing that the universe is infinitely relational; that my soul can be renewed—and I can have a fresh start in life. That I can be reborn into a diverse extended family. That priests, preachers, gurus, monks and ministers are *no* closer to God than I can be every day!**

-That, friends, is Good News! Believe it! Live it! And make sure that ***others*** have a chance to hear; “The God of this Universe is ***pursuing*** you—and He offers ***life!***”