

## The Original Good News

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Rich Correll of CPTI writes, 'In the midst of this darkness, we discovered a people of faith who exhibited incredible love, humility and warmth, refined by their persecution. Their passion for the gospel and willingness to suffer unto death for their faith made us doubt the authenticity of our own faith. This was not a "cheap grace."' (Maclellan newsletter, 2 Dec 11). This is a typical observation from a region of the world where the gospel of Jesus is being proclaimed widely and effectively in spite of prevalent opposition.

### Main points of this article

- Jesus himself commanded the gospel that his apostles proclaimed and that is preserved in the NT.
- The original gospel was a narrative that included history, eyewitness accounts, promises and an invitation.
- CPMs provide believers with gospel messages that can be easily learned, retold and passed on by others.
- The theological gospel revealed in the NT epistles provides the basis for victory over sinful habits.

### The Original Good News

The New Testament does not leave believers to their own clever creativity to come up with a gospel message. Rather Jesus himself commanded the Good News, after his return from physical death to life:

These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. ... Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. *Luke 24:44-49*

Thereafter, when and wherever the apostles proclaimed this Good News, they followed Jesus' pattern, expanding certain parts to meet their hearers' needs. See, for examples, Acts 2:22-25; 2:32-38; 3:13-15; 3:18-19, 26; 5:29-32; 10:38-43; 13:28-33; 17:2-3; 17:29-31; 26:18-23; Romans 1:1-6; 1 Cor. 15:1-8.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of these texts leads to this summary of the content of that original, apostolic gospel:

1. God has fulfilled all that his prophets foretold in the Scriptures would come to pass.
2. God sent Jesus to be his promised Messiah. God anointed Jesus with his Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.
3. Although Jesus was the holy and righteous one, lawless men killed him by crucifixion. It was God's plan for his Messiah, the Author of Life, to suffer and to be put to death, for human sins. Afterwards, men buried his body in a tomb.
4. On the third day afterwards, God raised his servant Jesus from death back to life, and Jesus appeared for many days to many who knew him. God has given assurance to all by exalting Jesus up into heaven as Lord and Saviour.
5. God now commands everyone everywhere to repent from his wickedness, and to turn from the power of Satan to God. 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.'
6. God will forgive you of your sins through Jesus' name. All who believe in Jesus are freed from everything, and Jesus makes them clean. He will also raise them back to life, when he returns.
7. God is going to judge all people everywhere, by Jesus whom he appointed Judge of the living and the dead. Jesus has commanded his followers to tell this message to all kinds of people everywhere.
8. After Jesus rose from death, he appeared to those who had lived with him and saw him being exalted to the right hand of God. God chose these men to serve as witnesses to these things.
9. God gives his promised Holy Spirit, with power, to those who lovingly obey Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> From <[http://www.paul-timothy.net/pages/jesus/original\\_apostolic\\_good\\_news.html](http://www.paul-timothy.net/pages/jesus/original_apostolic_good_news.html)>.

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Those who respond to this message, normally express their repentance by (a) getting baptized, (c) being added to a new or existing community (church), and (c) learning to obey Jesus' commandments.

### The Good News in CPMs

Church planting movements, also called rapid disciple making, must provide new and old believers with a set of gospel messages that each one can learn by heart. Movement leaders then plan with believers where, when and with whom they will go share those messages, inviting others to repent then and there. Many do so! T4T ([www.t4t-online.org](http://www.t4t-online.org)), T&M ([www.trainandmultiply.com](http://www.trainandmultiply.com)), P-T ([www.paul-timothy.net](http://www.paul-timothy.net)) and many other available programs supply sample gospel messages that can be adopted, modified or replaced by more culturally-suitable ones.<sup>2</sup>

*Train & Multiply*<sup>TM</sup>, for example, provides eight memorable, bible stories that believers and seekers can present to individuals or, better, to households, usually in repeated visits. These include:

1. Noah saved from a flood
2. Jesus death and resurrection
3. A son who repented
4. An Ethiopian official who got baptized
5. A Philippian gaoler who believed
6. Bread that came down from heaven
7. Jesus' power over demons
8. Saul met Jesus raised to life

### The Theological Gospel

The gospel as taught in some schools and churches is often expressed in theological terms of 'satisfaction' or of 'substitution'. On the one hand, Christ is said to have satisfied God's demand for righteousness by dying in behalf of unrighteous humans, and on the other hand, Christ paid the penalty for human sins by dying in their place. Typically, the theological gospel follows a linear, logical, abstract approach similar to this one:

1. You are a sinner, and you have violated God's law.
2. God is angry with you, and you are in danger of hell.
3. God showed his love for you by sending Jesus to die in your place.
4. You must accept Jesus as your personal Saviour. Say this little prayer ...

Now, the first three ideas are true to Scripture and millions have come to faith in Christ through messages about those ideas. However, this is a theology of the Good News; it is not the Good News that Jesus commanded. Theological gospel messages usually avoid all reference to historical facts except the crucifixion, and often neglect mention of Jesus resurrection from death to life, which figured in all NT gospel messages.

There are also weaknesses in the theological gospel. First, it requires an awareness of the gospel story from other sources. Second, it presupposes a culture that believes in guilt and feels guilt, whereas many cultures remain more sensitive to matters of shame or of power. Third, it is usually presented to an individual apart from his family or friends, leading to a private faith. Last, lacking repentance, it makes conversion so easy that supposed converts often do not endure. Over time, lands that adopt a theological gospel may lose touch with the original Good News, privatise their faith, and generally reject Christianity as an out-dated philosophy.

### Conclusion

MentorNet recommends that churches, missions and believers adopt the original Good News, and learn to tell the Good News as a story, repeatedly, inviting hearers to repent and to obey Jesus in love, bringing new believers immediately into new fellowships or churches. This is the message that the Holy Spirit blesses, making it the 'power of God for salvation to all who believe it'. Explain the theology of the Good News to those who have become believers, for that theology provides power to lead a life of victory over sinful practices (Rom. 6).

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<sup>2</sup> See, for an example, <<http://www.paul-timothy.net/html/storybook.html>>.