

# Following Christ: The Gospel Message



## Slice F7

### The Gospel Message

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## 1 Memory Verse

### John 3:16 (ESV)

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

## 2 The Gospel Message

The word ‘Gospel’ means ‘good news,’ and the four Gospels are written by four different witnesses to the life of Jesus. Just as four witnesses to a car accident viewed from four different corners of an intersection would have four different views of the same accident. Their testimonies would include both overlapping confirmations and different insights that could only be seen from the individual’s viewpoint. The four Gospels are written for four different groups of people and portray Jesus from four different perspectives:

- The Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews and portrays Jesus as the Messiah.
- The Gospel of Mark was written for the Romans and portrays Jesus as a servant of man, meeting their deepest needs.
- The Gospel of Luke was written for the Greeks and portrays Jesus as the perfect (divine) man.
- The Gospel of John was written for all people groups and portrays Jesus as the Son of God.

The Good News for mankind is captured in four different ways, but an overriding message is carried through all of them:

### 2.1 God Loves Us

#### John 3:16 (ESV)

16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

#### Romans 5:8 (ESV)

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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The core of the Gospel message is that God loves each one of us so much that He was willing to allow Jesus to die for our salvation. This great love is also seen in the fact that Jesus loves us so much that He was willing to give up His throne in heaven to become a servant to all mankind and then to die for those who chose to return His love. Mankind was lost to a Holy God because of their sinful nature, only a great expression of unconditional love could restore that relationship.

## ***2.2 Jesus is God in the Flesh***

### **Luke 1:35 (NIV)**

**35** The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

### **Philippians 2:6–8 (NIV)**

**6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; **7** rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Jesus, by becoming God in the flesh was then able to face all that fallen mankind must endure and He revealed His great love for us. He was born in a manger, raised in a poor family, learned a trade, and then had to support His mother, brothers, and sisters on Joseph's death. He experienced hunger, thirst, weariness, and great pain yet, despite all the hardships He lived through, He did not sin. He remained the perfect man, an example to us all - His life was dedicated to the service of others, He was the perfect servant. All evidence that He is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus was recognised as God by His disciples. Peter is able to answer Jesus' question as to who the disciples believed He really was:

### **Matthew 16:16 (NIV)**

**16** Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

The belief of the disciples that Jesus is the Son of God was reiterated by Thomas when he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus. On seeing Jesus for himself, the man who had been doubting the resurrection cried out, 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20:28). Jesus is the second person of the Godhead, the first being the Father and the third being the Holy Spirit. The three together are referred to as 'the Trinity' in Christianity.

## ***2.3 Jesus Atoned for Our Sins on the Cross***

The Bible calls Jesus the 'Lamb of God' and, just as the Passover lamb was slaughtered so that the judgment of God would pass over the nation of Israel, Jesus died on the cross for

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the sins of mankind. The Passover lamb is a direct pointer to Jesus. At 15:00 on the eve of Passover, the High Priest cut the throat of the Passover lamb so that there would be time to prepare the lamb for the evening meal. It was also at 15:00 that Jesus breathed His last and died on the cross. This allowed time for the women to prepare His body for burial and place it in the tomb before 18:00, the start of the Passover.

It was the prophet Isaiah who, seven hundred years before the crucifixion of Jesus, foretold the events and the purpose of the 'Lamb of God':

## **Isaiah 53:4–5 (NIV)**

**4** Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

## **Isaiah 53:12 (NIV)**

**12** ... For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

The main goal of the life of Jesus was to take our sins on Himself, so that we may be restored to a relationship with God the Father. Jesus described the purpose of His life succinctly, saying:

## **Mark 10:45 (NIV)**

**45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Through the sacrificial work of Jesus, those who accept Him as their Lord and Saviour become justified. This means that instead of being seen as the filthy, sinful peasants that we are, we are declared righteous and become children of the Most High God. Nothing can ever separate the believer from the Love of God; the believer has been set free!

After justification comes sanctification, where God as a loving Father moulds us into the image of His Son. This is a long-term process where God teaches us, through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, how to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

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## 2.4 The Lord's Supper - Communion



It is of great importance that all believers continually remember the great Love that God has for them. What a tremendous gift every believer received through the death of Jesus on the cross! The atoning death of Jesus is remembered by believers through taking part in communion, also known as the Lord's Supper, by eating unleavened bread and drinking grape juice. This act commemorates Jesus' last meal with his disciples (Matthew 26:26-29). The Apostle Paul explained it this way:

### **1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NIV)**

**23** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

There are two elements to the Lord's supper:

- The **Bread** reminds us that Jesus' body was broken or given for us.
- The **Cup** reminds us that Jesus' blood was shed for us.

We are never to forget or to take lightly Jesus' sacrifice for our sins. A warning is given by Paul about what anyone who takes part in communion unworthily will face:

### **1 Corinthians 11:27–29 (ESV)**

**27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

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The Lord's Supper must be seen as an act of worship and taken with the reverence that it deserves.

## **2.5 Jesus was raised from the Dead.**

### **Luke 24:1–6 (NIV)**

**1** On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. **5** In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

The resurrection of Jesus is the very heart of the Christian faith. All 13 sermons in the book of Acts have only one thing in common – that Jesus is alive, and He is working to change people's lives. The resurrection is mentioned more than 100 times in the New Testament. The message is clear, Jesus not only lived and died for our sins but, on the third day He rose again from the dead. Without the resurrection, there is no gospel, as Paul explains to the Corinthians, 'if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:17).

But, as many believers do, we must not stop at this point of logic, we must go further. Jesus was the first person resurrected from the dead, the resurrection of Jesus points to the promise of His return and our resurrection. We, at the return of Jesus for His Bride, will be transformed, 'for this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality' (1 Cor. 15:53). The return of Jesus is our great hope, our strength in adversity: 'We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13). The return of Jesus to establish His Kingdom and rule and to reign with us enables a believer to face the trials of this life, knowing that there is something much better yet to come. That hope is founded on the resurrection of Jesus.

The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is exceptionally strong, such as the eyewitness testimony that Paul records in His first letter to the Corinthians. The total number of men who saw the resurrected Jesus was around 550. Paul records that over 500 men witnessed Jesus in His resurrected body at one time (1 Corinthians 15:3-7). Paul is no fool, he is a lawyer, and knows that his recording of an official witness list in a letter could be used against him. Paul had many enemies who, if he had fabricated this account, would have used the information to persecute him. The timing of the letter, 25 years after the resurrection, was such that most of the witnesses were still alive at that time and could have been called to testify. Paul is making it clear that Jesus' resurrection is a fact, which could at the time of the writing of his letter be verified by a multitude of witnesses.

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There are very important distinctions between Christianity and other religions. For example, Christianity is the only religion that does not require the follower to perform works to attain salvation. The requirement to attain eternal life for a Christian is faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. The acceptance that He died on the cross for our sins and, on the third day, He was raised from the dead:

## **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

**8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

Another important distinction that separates Christianity from other religions is the resurrection; the tomb of Jesus is empty. Muhammad's grave lies within the confines of what used to be his and his wife, Aisha's, house. Gautama Buddha's body was cremated in Kushinagar, India and the Ramabhar Stupa was built over a portion of the Buddha's ashes, on the spot where he was cremated. Hindus believe in reincarnation and that the cycle is only broken when the individual attains godhood - Nirvana. The bodies of these Hindu godmen (women cannot attain godhood) are cremated, and none of them has ever been resurrected.

The resurrection of Jesus is totally unique and is a confirmation of His death on the cross for our sins. Jesus is alive. He is present with us and in us today by His Spirit.

## **2.6 Jesus Lives in us by His Spirit**

The Gospels truly are good news, the blessings they record just keep on coming for they also record that the spirit of Jesus lives in us. Jesus said:

## **John 14:23 (NIV)**

**23** Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and **we will come to them and make our home with them.**

When a person believes in their heart and confesses with their mouth that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour, the Holy Spirit makes the person's spirit come alive. This is the second birth; they are born again. Born once die twice, born twice die once!

## **John 3:5–7 (ESV)**

**5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

So, the first act of the Holy Spirit is the regeneration at conversion, when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the heart of the new believer: This then places the believer into union with God, and into union with other believers in the body of Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings life to our spirits and commences the work of sanctification, transforming us into the

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image of Jesus. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the next stage, where the believer is empowered by the Spirit of God for service, enabling them to bear witness to the world.

## **Acts 1:8 NIV)**

**8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

## **John 15:5 (NIV)**

**5** Jesus never intended the believer to fulfil the great commission on their own strength and ability, His warning was clear ‘...For without me you can do nothing.’

## **3 Practically**

- Jesus paid a great price for your salvation; you are to remember the cost of your eternal life and to live a life worthy of that sacrifice.
- Your salvation was provided as a gift through faith and not of works. What are you going to do with that gift? The Holy Spirit lives in you as a result of the resurrection of Jesus. You have God in you, His power, His glory; use it!
- Your great hope is the return of Jesus, you are to remember that you are a part of the Bride of Christ and are to watch and pray for His return.
- It is of great importance for you as a believer to continually remember the great Love God has for you and the tremendous gift each believer received through the death of Jesus on the cross. You are, therefore, required to continually remember the atoning death of Jesus through the act of communion.

## **4 Proclamation**

‘I declare that I am a sinner saved by the grace of God, through the work of the cross. I, therefore, count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus as my Lord. My Goal is a deeper relationship with You Lord Jesus and to fulfil Your plans and purposes for my life.’

## **5 Prayer**

‘Thank you Father for the Good News that my Lord Jesus has paid the price for my sins and that I have been set free. Thank you that this has changed my life and I am a new creation in a relationship with my Saviour. I rejoice in the knowledge that I have eternal life and that my Saviour is returning to claim His Church, of which I am a part. Come soon Lord Jesus, Amen!’