

First Steps 3

What is the Gospel?

Gospel means “good news.” What is the news and why is it good? First, we need to hear the bad news.

Let’s imagine this scenario:

A guest is coming to visit your home. You are eager to receive the guest, but there is a dilemma. The guest comes into the house wearing muddy boots; it is obvious the guest is either unaware or unconcerned about Japanese sensibilities regarding the cleanliness of their home.



Consider: Would you ask the guest to remove their shoes?

The natural thing to do would be to kindly ask the guest to remove their shoes. Even if the guest simply tries to wipe the mud from their shoes without removing them completely, that is not enough. You would likely insist that no impurities from outside be allowed in the house.

This scenario is similar to how God deals with us. God has invited every single person (including you) into a relationship with him, yet every single person has impurities in their life. Just as entering a home with muddy shoes is offensive to the host, the impurities within all of us are offensive to a perfect and pure God. The Bible talks about our inability to make our hearts pure, and calls this impurity “sin.”

What is mankind’s problem? Sin.



Proverbs 20:9

Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”?



Romans 3:23

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

The Japanese word for sin (tsumi, 罪) makes us think of crime (hanzai, 犯罪). So you might think, “I’ve never committed a crime, never stolen, or committed murder.” But sin is not merely breaking a human law; sin is failing to live up to God’s absolute purity, perfection, and Law.

Some examples of God’s Law can be found in **Exodus 20**:



You shall have no others gods.

You shall not worship idols.

You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet.

Jesus also summarized God’s Law like this:



Matthew 22:37-39

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

In summary: Love God, love people.



Consider: Have you obeyed every single one of these laws?

If we’re honest, we know that we have broken at least one of God’s laws. By breaking one law, the Bible teaches that in God’s eyes, we are guilty of having broken them all. And in breaking God’s Law, we are impure.



James 2:10a

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

The Bible teaches that God's Law applies not only to our actions, but to our hearts as well. During Jesus' three years of ministry, the Jewish religious leaders were very good at keeping God's Law. However, their hearts were still far from God. Jesus once spoke to them like this:



Matthew 23:27-28

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness."

Jesus also said:



Matthew 5:21-22

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Jesus taught that the heart of the problem is a problem of the heart.

Conclusion: We are all guilty of sin.

What is the punishment for sin? Death.



Consider: Have you ever thought about what happens to us after we die?

The Bible clearly answers the question of what happens after we die.



Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death...

Note: "Death" in Romans 6:23 is not only referring to a physical death, but an eternal death--eternal separation from God.

Sin separates us from God.



Isaiah 59:2

...but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.



After death we face judgment.



Hebrews 9:27

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...

There is no reincarnation, and there are no second chances after death. When we die we are judged for our sins.

This following scripture is difficult to read, but it gives us a picture of what eternity without God is like--hell.



2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

...in a flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...

The Good News

The good news is that God sent his Son Jesus, who became a man, lived a perfect life, died in our place for our sins, and rose from the dead to reconcile us to God.



Romans 5:8

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus paid the price (death) for our sins so that we can be forgiven and all our sins can be washed away. The Bible tells us that the blood of Jesus purifies us from sin.



1 John 1:7b

...and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus' death and resurrection not only cleanses us of our sin, but it also credits us with righteousness—that is, right-standing before God.



Romans 4:24-25

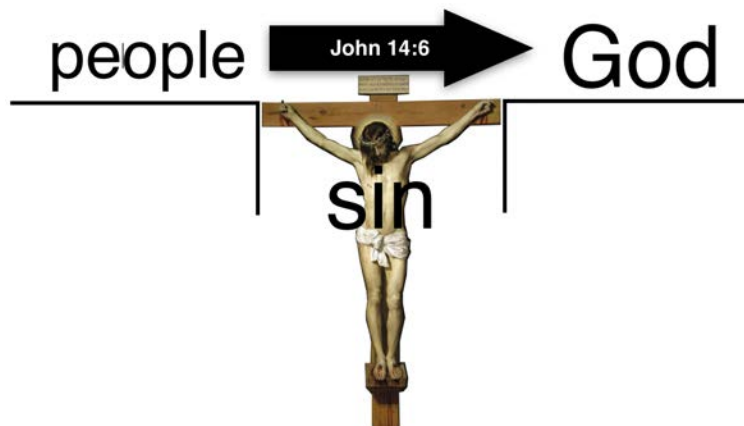
It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

The only way to God is through Jesus Christ.



John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."



Without Jesus we are guilty, meaning we are impure and destined for hell. Through Jesus we receive forgiveness of our sins, meaning we have right-standing before God and eternal life in heaven.



Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Consider: What are ways that people might think to deal with their sin and guilt apart from Jesus?

The truth is, we cannot do enough good to ever be good enough before a perfectly pure and holy God. We can never do enough good to erase the bad that we have done. The only hope that we have lies in what Jesus has done for us, which is a free gift for us to receive.

How can we receive this gift of God?



Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The gift of forgiveness of sins and eternal life are only received through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot be earned in any way. It is a gift of God received only through faith.



Romans 10:9

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Placing faith in Jesus as your Lord means recognizing and denying other allegiances and loyalties. This is demonstrated by such acts as constantly seeking to fight sin in our lives, false gods, other religions, the pursuit of self-righteousness, etc. Rather than these things, the Christian seeks to love and pursue Jesus more than anything else.

Jesus knows that there are many aspects of our lives that can be wrongly elevated to a position that only he deserves, that of Lord. Following Jesus as Lord means we are loyal to him above all else. Honoring and following him in all that we do comes from our obedience to him: in our jobs, in our education, in how we treat one another, and even in our own families. As Christians we love our families because we follow Jesus. If one's family members are not Christians then his or her decision to follow Christ can be met with confusion and disapproval. But because the teaching of Jesus in the Bible, as covered in this lesson, about sin, death, judgment, and salvation are true, the most loving act you can do for your family members is to follow Jesus yourself and share him with your family members.



Consider: Are you ready to receive the free gift of salvation? Think about the following questions to help you decide where you are on your journey toward God.

Do you believe you are a sinner and that you need Jesus?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the one true God?

Do you believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins and save you?

Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Are you ready to profess, in faith, Jesus as your Lord and savior?

Are you ready to repent, be baptized, and start a new life with Jesus?

To prepare for "First Steps: Step 4," take some time this week to familiarize yourself with the lesson. Also, if there is time, keep reading about Jesus and his gospel message in the Gospel of Mark and the book of Romans.