

What is the Gospel?

(a Discipleship Snapshot)



Many today know the Name of Jesus, but as I talk to more people and work in more homes, I'm starting to realize that many people today know a different Jesus. Why is that? I think it's because they are not reading Jesus' words for themselves and because many pastors are not reading many of Jesus' words either - sticking to more clichés, like: 'Love God, Love People'... which isn't even close to what Jesus said (*but that's another study entirely*). So, if you'll join me, I'd like to review some basic truths and 101 foundation for the gospel. Ready? Let's dig in! *(One quick editor note: if you see a typo or a missed verse, please email me - my email is at the bottom. Thank you, SH)*

Many know this passage: **“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”** (1st Corinthians 15:3-4) ~ and this one: **“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”** (1st Corinthians 2:1-2) ~ Many also know John 3:16: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** (John 3:16) ~ But, are those really all we are called to preach? Can anyone get saved with those few pieces of information? Jesus and His apostles and the early church taught many more important teachings as part of their gospel presentations, than just the facts that Jesus died for sin, was buried and rose again. So... it seems to me that something is missing. There are gaps in many people's message that they believe and have been taught is 'the gospel'. So, if you will allow me, I'd like to look at a series of pieces that I believe, according to Scripture - including Jesus, Peter, John, and Paul's teachings - needs to be included in the gospel message for a person to get genuinely saved, and not be a false convert. You in? Okay! Here we go!

So, first question: who is Jesus? A man? Yeah - the only perfect Man who walked planet Earth. But, was He just man? No. Here's what Scripture says: **"Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [King David] that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he [David], foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."'"** (Acts 2:31-35)

> We see here that Jesus is God and He came to be the Messiah, that He was crucified, raised again, and now sits at the right hand of the Father, till the next time He comes.

"In the beginning was the Word [Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word is God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him is life, and the life is the light of men... That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He [Christ] was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-14)

"¹¹For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1st Corinthians 3:11)

"⁶ Jesus said to him, "I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

A) Jesus is God and the only way to Heaven.

So, that starts it. But why did He come? **"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**" (John 1:29)

> We see here that Jesus is the Lamb of God, again - Messiah, but we get another piece here: Jesus came to take away sin....

B) Jesus is the Messiah, Lamb of God - He came to be the sacrifice for our sins.

So, what is sin? **"Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness."** (1st John 3:4)

> We see here sin is not mistakes, but lawlessness. What is that? An attitude and lifestyle of rebellion against what God has commanded us to do and not do. Another way Scripture puts it is: doing what's right in our own eyes (Deuteronomy 12:8, Judges

17:6, Judges 21:25; Proverbs 21:2). Another thing Scripture calls this is "self-willed" (2nd Peter 2:10). What is all of that? To put it in the best short phrase I can find: rebellion against God. Many Bible teachers point out that there are much more commands throughout Scripture - some just aren't preceded by an announcement that this is what the Lord is saying. God's Law shows up in His character, and in His created order. God literally displays His character, laws, and holiness right before our eyes - in creation (Romans 1), in our hearts (Romans 2:14), and the existence of their conscience (Romans 2:15). "**(... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the Law, these, although not having the Law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)...**" (Romans 2:14-15)...

So, back to sin - what is it? Lawlessness and willful rebellion against God. Do we have any way to define what a sin is? Sure we do - The 10 Commandments are a good start (Exodus 20), but Jesus' teachings add to them. Let's review briefly --

1) God is the only God - He's the God of us, Creator and Judge. We shall not follow other 'gods'. *Jesus enhanced this when He taught with emphasis the greatest commandment*: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, and do that with all of your strength.
[Exodus 20:1-3; Mark 12:30]

2) Do not carve, create, bow to, worship, or serve any other 'gods' (includes men). *God explain this further, speaking through Paul*: do not make yourselves slaves of men.
[Exodus 20:4-6; 1st Corinthians 7:23]

3) Do not use God's Name carelessly. God will not let those who do be counted guiltless. *And, Jesus explained this further*: Do not swear oaths or give boasts in God's Name. [Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37]

4) Keep the Sabbath holy (set apart) to the Lord. *Jesus explained this further*:
[Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:7; Romans 14:4-6]

5) Honor your Father and Mother with the promise of a long life on the earth. *God explained this further, through Paul*: Children obey your parents, honor them. And Fathers don't exasperate your children, but teach them.
[Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21]

6) Do not murder. (The literal word should be translated murder, and this is backed up by other parts of the Bible). *Jesus explained what was also included in the category of murder*: hatred, anger without a cause and willingness to get physical revenge to destroy those who have hurt us.
[Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-22,38-48]

7) Do not be sexually immoral. (*Study this passage out in connection with other teachings of the Mosaic law, and you see this command includes all varieties of sexual perversion.*) Jesus explained this further: lust to God is liken to doing much of sexual immorality. (The new testament repeats this command more like this: flee sexual immorality.) And a godly man is commanded not to touch a lady (other than his wife) in any way that stirs up sexual desire.

[Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:27-28; 1st Corinthians 6:18 - 7:1-2]

8) Do not steal. (Biblical definition includes ill-gotten gain, extortion, and dishonest scales.) Jesus repeated this command as is. And God explained further: do not defraud, and about laziness.

[Exodus 20:15; Mark 10:19; 1st Thessalonians 4:6; 2nd Thessalonians 3:10]

9) You shall not be dishonest with or against your neighbor. Jesus repeated this command. God repeated this in James, where James repeated and taught something Jesus explained: let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no'. All else is from the evil one, and gets us in danger of judgment.

[Exodus 20:16; Matthew 5:37; James 5:12]

10) Do not covet anything that is your neighbor's, nor his wife, nor his servants. God, through Paul, James and John explained this further: covetousness is idolatry, and it is loving this sin-cursed world with its sinful pleasures and temporary treasures.

[Exodus 20:17; Colossians 3:5; James 4:1-4; 1st John 2:15-17]

C) What is sin? Rebellion against God's character and holiness displayed in the law and His creation. ~

Ok, so let's review what we've seen so far.

A) Jesus is God.

B) Jesus is the Messiah, Lamb of God - He came to be the sacrifice for our sins.

C) What is sin? Rebellion against God's character and holiness displayed in the law and His creation. ~

So, is anyone not guilty when compared to the law of God that we find in the above Scriptures and that is also written on our hearts? No. Romans 3 talks about this: "As it is written: **"There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God... Destruction and misery are in their ways' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes' ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** (Romans 3:10-23) That was pretty all-inclusive there (James 2:10-12 adds more).

So, we see:

D) We are all guilty of sin/rebellion against the Holy God, Creator, and Judge.

So we're guilty. The next question is - what are the consequences of sin?

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) -- Also, if we say that we haven't sinned, we lie. 1st John talks about this: ⁵"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1st John 1:5-10)

> The wages of sin/rebellion is destruction and ultimately Hell. We see this again in Galatians 6: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart." (Galatians 6:7-9)

Rebellion against God, His law, and the holy standard of righteousness leads to destruction, and eventually death and forever torment in the Lake of Fire. Jesus taught that more than anyone. But, we see one clear, historical account in Luke 16. ¹⁹There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' ²⁵But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' ²⁷Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' " (Luke 16:19-31)

> Jesus taught many more verses on this. If you'd like to see more, do your own study, or email me: Steven.H3@gmail.com.

So, E) sin has eternal consequences in 1 of two eternal destinations. Both Heaven and the Lake of Fire are eternal places for eternal souls. You can find a study on Facebook about Hell and the many times Jesus explained it (more than just a few words) here: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/snapshots-of-a-disciple/does-hell-exist-if-so-whats-it-like-where-is-it/463134150396389>

So, but what about my good deeds? Won't they help me with God? **"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags..."** (Isaiah 64:6) God, through Paul, says this **"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." (Romans 4:4)

> In the Greek, this is more clear: if we want to be made right by our works, we have to keep the whole law and be perfect. Or as soon as we choose to sin once, we're condemned... which is the point of the law. We can't earn salvation. We must turn from sin to Christ, to be saved by faith. As it says in Romans: **"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be shown as guilty before God."** (Romans 3:19)

F) Good deeds cannot undo one act of rebellion or bribe the Creator and Judge of the Universe.

So, what do we do? Is there hope? Or is it hopeless?

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) The Greek word there for 'sinners' has more weight and also can be translated rebel or enemy. So, the good news of the gospel is that even though we've rebelled against God, He died so that we can be forgiven, our sins cleansed and our souls can now spend forever in Heaven - instead of Hell. Again, God says: **"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."** (2nd Peter 3:9)

G) Because Christ came, there is hope for salvation.

So, how do we get salvation? There's one key word there: ***repent!*** John the Baptizer preached it, Jesus preached it, and Jesus' apostles (like Peter and Paul) preached it. **"In those days John the Baptizer came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'"** (Matthew 3:1-2)

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord..." (Peter in Acts 3:19)

So, what is repentance?

The compound Greek word appears to be a change of mind that heart-motivation, that then changes the actions. That catches part of the Biblical meaning, but pulling a few verses together gives and even clearer picture. John the Baptizer said it this way:

"But when John the Baptizer saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance...'" (Matthew 3:7-8)

And in Luke, we see more: **"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."** (Luke 3:8-9)

H) Repentance is essential for salvation.

In the Old Testament, we see more vivid wording. **"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh."** (Ezekiel 36:26) God through Paul says it this way: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2nd Corinthians 5:17)

I) Repentance is shown by a change of heart, not just a change of mind.

A change of actions is an outward evidence of genuine repentance, and lack of change needs to bring our salvation into question. Jesus Himself linked obedience to His teachings to genuine repentance and love for Him. **"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"** (Luke 6:46) And again in John 14, Jesus said: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments... He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."** (John 14:15,21,23,24)

J) Genuine repentance leads to a change of heart that shows itself in a change of lifestyle

Is salvation assured? Meaning - are we able to be sure of our salvation? Yes!

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." (1st John 5:13)

"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise..." (Ephesians 1:13)

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (Romans 8:16)

K) We can be sure of our salvation, if we are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

So, everyone whose life changes is saved, right? Not according to Jesus: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

>> These people called Jesus their Master, but they refused to obey Jesus. Jesus told them to leave His presence because though they said they loved Him, their actions showed their heart really loved their rebellion against God, and the lawlessness of the world. "God said it this way in Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) And God, through Paul, gave us this admonition: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." (2nd Corinthians 13:5)

L) We can deceive ourselves and not be saved. We need to examine ourselves.

There has to be some standard by which to tell if we are genuinely saved or not? Surely, there is some teaching of Jesus that will help us to see where we are on this? Yes, there is, it's called the 'Parable of Soils'. In this parable, we find Jesus taught about 6 different soil types. The focus is on the soil's acceptance of the seed, which in spiritual terms is the heart/soul's acceptance of the call of the gospel. These soils are: 1) hardened heart-soil, 2) shallow heart-soil, 3) thorn-choked heart-soil, 4) genuine caring heart-soil that produce some, 5) genuine caring heart-soil that produce more, and 6) genuine caring heart-soil that produced the most.

"¹⁸Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the Word of the Kingdom, and does not understand/value it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰ But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, immediately he stumbles. ²² Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the Word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³ But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the Word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13:18-23)

"¹³ And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you

understand all the parables? ¹⁴ The sower sows the Word. ¹⁵ And these are the ones by the wayside where the Word is sown. When they hear, satan comes immediately and takes away the Word that was sown in their hearts. ¹⁶ These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the Word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷ and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the Word's sake, immediately they stumble. ¹⁸ Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the Word, ¹⁹ and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²⁰ But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the Word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." (Mark 4:13-20)

> Okay, let's review what we see here. We see some hearts instantly rejected the truth because they loved their sin, and they lost the truth just as fast as they heard it. *That is the wayside heart-soil.* Then we see those who heard something about God that they liked: love, joy, peace... but they had no commitment to turn from sin or to really follow Christ with all of their heart, so when peer-pressure (persecution) or a little temptation (to sin) of some sort came, they fell away and produced no fruit - unsaved. *That is the shallow heart-soil.* Then we see some hearts who accept more of the truth and actually stick around for a while near the honest teaching of the Word, but eventually when it comes time to choose more solidly between Christ or the sins they want, the cares of this world, deceitfulness of riches and desires for other things - choke out the Word of God and teaching to obey it, and they prove unsaved and unfruitful. As God said through the apostle John, in 1st John: **"They went out from us, because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us."** (1st John 2:19) *That is the worldly thorn-choked heart-soil.*

But, then the good news. Those who persevered through trials and kept choosing to follow Christ - despite the opposition, ridicule, persecution, and seeming earthly losses, they obtained salvation and proved faithful some quite a bit, and some a lot. Only God knows quite how He will sort all of that out, but we can gain wisdom from aiming to be as effective in turning people from sin to Christ as we possibly can. Many saints who have gone before us proved faithful, and their testimony also encourages us, as Hebrews 12 explains. *Those hearts who are faithful to stay true to Christ and keep growing closer to Him and serving Him more and more - are the faithful soils we see in Jesus' teaching above.*

So, as you see there, some can look saved for a while, but in time, the fruit will show - sometimes quickly, sometimes not so quickly. But, the fruit, works, motivation and pattern of their life will show - here on earth, and much more in Heaven. Jesus taught it in a different form in Mark 8. **"When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save**

it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’” (Mark 8:34-38)

> Jesus reminds of the cost of salvation here... but He also asks some deep-probing questions. Like what are you and I selling our eternal soul for? The teaching is that you and I are selling our soul for temporary treasure or earthly pleasure, or giving ourselves whole-heartedly to serve and follow Christ for all of our days. That needs to be something we dwell on regularly for the rest of our short life down here! :)

Another parable Jesus taught that teaches this clearly and we find it in two forms, but it looks to me like basically the same parable. Either way, both of these parables make basically the same key points and their conclusions and teachings explain to us more on this subject of identifying our heart's direction. In this study, I'm only looking at the Parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

Then he who had received the one talent came and said, ‘Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ‘And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents.’ ‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

(Matthew 25:14-30)

> That's the parable of the talents, and no, it's obviously not talking about abilities or gifts to do things - it's talking about a type of money back in Jesus' day called a talent and it was common- day's wages for the common worker. I've seen some compare what that would be like today... and I don't have a way to tell you for sure what that is, but day's wage gives you a starting idea. The teaching here is that the person given 5 days wages to use and gain increase on (invest, of sorts) - doubled what was entrusted to him. The guy given two day's wages to use and gain increase on (invest of sorts), also doubled what was entrusted to him. But, the guy entrusted with 1 day's wages to use and gain increase on... didn't. Meaning: as you can see, he didn't do anything at all. He buried the day's wages. Why? Well, Jesus' rebuke at the end teaches it - he was lazy, and even the servant's own mouth was quick to try to blame and falsely accuse his Master. The servant even insulted his Master to try to get out of trouble. Wrong choice, wrong answer. ~ What's the spiritual lesson? Be busy with activities that God gives you (physically and spiritually) and be using those tools as ways to direct people to know that they need to get right with God, and/or to help those who do know Jesus to grow in following Him and His Word more. The other side of the teaching is don't rebel against God, fight for your sin and then try to blame Him. He's not guilty of your rebellion, but you'll be adding to your judgment.

> But one other thing we can easily see in this parable: Jesus will judge us by how faithfully we helped those around us to take His Word seriously and how much we moved away from sin so we could effectively serve Him with our lives, time, and energy. But, those who reject Him will be thrown into the utter darkness. That includes those who use talents and abilities that God has given them to use to help people get right with Him - for themselves, their selfish agendas, and their fame with other humans here on earth. Not only will they lose any reward, but they will be thrown into the Lake of Fire forever. That's scary!... but, it's not true of those who are genuinely saved. Those who love Jesus will serve Him, in accordance with how much they stir one another up to become a growing obedient faith and good works. **"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."** (Hebrews 10:23-25)

M) Jesus gave patterns in His teachings, that give us His standards for us to use to compare to our lives and tell which heart-soil we are and how seriously we are taking His Word and growing to obey it.

One other key part of the gospel message that I hear a lack of, especially in what are called 'churches' in America - is the reminder of the cost of discipleship. You say, Steven, what do you mean? Well, let's look at a passage where Jesus explains it a little, then I can explain further and show more verses that pull the picture together.

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land... but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 14:24-35)

> Okay, a little review here. The English translations here are... almost hard to figure out. In the Greek, what Jesus is teaching here is that we are to love Him and be more loyal to Him, than family, friends, or anyone else who would pull us away from Christ back into the ways of sin. It's the idea of loving Christ *more* than the others. We have to keep our heart in His Word and loyal to Him, as we kick more sinful ways out of our life. It's the only way we can grow in our fellowship with Him, and the only way we can keep becoming more and more effective in reaching the lost with the gospel and message of Jesus. So, after Jesus explains that contrast in our affection for Him and those who would pull us away from Him, He then calls us to count the cost. OH! He's making the point further, isn't He? We need to ask ourselves are we willing to die for Christ? If we were put in a position where our life would be over if we were to say yes we love and follow Christ - would we say yes? So, it follows that if we would be willing to die for Christ, we must also be willing to live for Christ. Those are one and the same. If we will not live for Christ, we most likely also would not die for Him either. ~ That is the counting the cost that Jesus is describing.

So, let's recap here. What is salvation? Well, we see something in the parable of the soils a pattern that most don't analyze, I think. So, please allow me to explain. Salvation isn't: say a prayer, and continue life as normal. Salvation isn't even: say a prayer and change a little on the outside. No, genuine salvation, according to the Bible, is different. I liken it to several easy examples that mirror the ones found in the Parable of the Soils. Studying many of Jesus' teachings (including those mentioned above) many times over the years along with my family and other evangelists, I have come to the conclusion that salvation is more of a process than people understand. Is there an actual point where people get genuinely saved? Yes. But, according to Matthew 7:21-23 and other passages, many will think they are saved and will not be. The Parable of the soils shows a progression though. It can be likened to buying a car - some think about it, but never actually do. Others start making the payments, then decide they don't want the car. Others actually buy the car. Same with buying a house. And another example: engagement toward marriage. Some wish to get married, but never do. Some get into the engagement only to back out later. Others get married and stay married. All three of those are similar to the salvation

process. Some think about getting saved, but then they change their minds because of sin or the glitter of this world. Some people, when they realize that this call of the gospel is an absolute commitment to Christ in exclusion to the wrong things that they want, they say no - they don't want that - it costs too much. Others get more serious, but eventually fall away - never got saved. But, then there are those who get through both the tangles and barriers and do get saved, and they prove faithful to grow and serve Christ for the rest of their lives. I believe that best explains why we have so many false converts in America, today. Many think they are saved, but they didn't actually get saved - they stopped way short of salvation. So, they aren't saved, according to Jesus, they are self-deceived. Many don't realize how easily willful sin deceives and blinds... it's something we all need to learn about and watch out for. Jesus taught a gospel of discipleship - if it starts, it has to continue. If it doesn't continue, then it never started.

N) We need to count the cost and follow Jesus despite the cost we may feel here in this short lifetime for the salvation to be genuine.

Another key we see in Jesus Parable of the Soils (which you can find in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8), is the real connection between a genuine covenant relationship with Christ and growing to obey Him. You'll see two key words in conversations on Biblical doctrine - they are 'salvation' and 'sanctification'. And as you study the teachings of Jesus and His apostles and the early church, genuine salvation means that sanctification (spiritual growth) is going to be starting as instantly as they are genuinely saved. Another way to put this is that repentance has a starting point and carries through the rest of life here on earth. And when we, who are genuinely saved, are not growing regularly in understanding and letting go of more sin, and we start fighting for our sin, then He will chasten us and allow things in our lives that teach us by pain to not be determined to claim our right to do what we selfishly want to do. And, that process keeps us growing closer to Him by baby steps. And it's fed by spending quality time in the Word of God and moving away from anything or anyone that is dragging us back to the lifestyles and sins Jesus died to save us from.

Remember 2nd Corinthians 5? **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** (2nd Corinthians 5:17) -That's talking about a change of heart that starts in the inside and continues. Another passage I noted above that talks about this: **"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."** (1st John 5:13) -- In the Greek, this is more clear: the word 'believe' requires us to obey what we believe. We are acting out what we believe God is like. And if we believe God is 100% holy and will not change, as we grow in our understanding of Him and His beautiful holy character, it will lead to a growth in obedience as well. God's Word is written so that we will continue to believe and continue to grow. Here's another passage that spells it out more clearly - in command form. **"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness"**

love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.” (2nd Peter 1:5-9) --Notice the command to add to. There’s a progression here. Many sadly stop growing thinking they don’t need to do anymore and they will be grieving when they stand before Christ. We are to intentionally grow in understanding and consistently asking God to help us understand Him, how to please Him more, and how to get rid of anything that is stopping us, as well as how to reach those around us with His Word. 1st John also talks about stages of growth. “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.” (1st John 2:12-14) - Did you see it? There are 3 stages of spiritual growth - little children in the faith, young men (and women) in the faith, and fathers (and mothers) in the faith. Question for self-analysis: are you growing? Need to restart? Ask God to help you and He will!

O) Spiritual growth becomes the lifestyle of a genuine believer.

So, that about concludes what I can pull together on the gospel and essential pieces for a person to get genuinely saved, according to Christ and His apostles. I hope it helps. I’d like to review 2 more passages as I conclude this study.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:16-21) -- This is one of my favorite passages to preach through on the streets. Why? Because many know the first verse - John 3:16, but they don’t realize that Jesus kept teaching. What did He teach here that is so important? V17: Jesus didn’t come to condemn, but to save. V18: Those who believe and follow Christ are not condemned, but those who reject Christ reject the only pure Sacrifice for sins, the Lamb of God. V19: Jesus (the Light) came into the world and taught rebels how to find God, and they hated His message and rejected Him. V20: Those who practice evil hate what exposes their sin, and refuse to surrender to Christ. V21: Those who love Christ, keep cleansing their hearts and lives to be pure in His presence.

And the last passage: “**And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.**” (Matthew 28:18-20) ~ Yes, that is what’s called the ‘Great Commission’ - Some of Jesus’ last words and His final command to take the gospel throughout the world. But, there a few key things here people miss. I’ll just review briefly.

> Jesus has all authority, so He’s commanding us to do this. What is it? Go and preach the gospel *and* make disciples of Him (not us). At some point, baptize them as a public expression of an inward change of agreeing to becoming dead to sin and alive to Christ. And teaching everyone to observe and grow in obeying all that He has taught. That means we have to study regularly what He taught to then teach what He taught, because it’s not something you can pick up 100% in one sitting - it takes a life-study. Then the promise that His Holy Spirit is with us till the end of all things.

So, ending review:

A) Jesus is God.

B) Jesus is the Messiah, Lamb of God - He came to be the sacrifice for our sins.

C) What is sin? Rebellion against God's character and holiness displayed in the law and His creation. ~

D) We are all guilty of sin/rebellion against the Holy God, Creator, and Judge.

E) sin has eternal consequences in 1 of two eternal destinations.

F) Good deeds cannot undo one act of rebellion or bribe the Creator and Judge of the Universe.

G) Because Christ came, there is hope for salvation.

H) Repentance is essential for salvation.

I) Repentance is shown by a change of heart, not just a change of mind.

J) Genuine repentance leads to a change of heart that shows itself in a change of lifestyle

K) We can be sure of our salvation, if we are sealed by the Holy Spirit.

L) We can deceive ourselves and not be saved. We need to examine ourselves.

M) Jesus gave patterns in His teachings, that give us His standards for us to use to compare to our lives and tell which heart-soil we are and how seriously we are taking His Word and growing to obey it.

N) We need to count the cost and follow Jesus despite the cost we may feel here in this short lifetime for the salvation to be genuine.

O) Spiritual growth becomes the lifestyle of a genuine believer.

I know this is incomplete. And I know some other good Bible students have done similar studies. I hope this helps you to share the gospel with boldness wherever you go. Feel free to email me questions or just say hey, or do the same on Facebook. You can email me and find me on Facebook with the same email: Steven.H3@gmail.com. ~ Praying for you! Please pray for me and my family! ~ a growing servant/life-slave of Jesus, SH

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word and for allowing us to study it together! Help us to study it and find how to seek You and serve You more through it. Help us to keep studying and understand how to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and Jesus' message more clearly, accurately and effectively to this lost and dying world, and to encourage believers in their spiritual growth. Please purify us and use us. We pray this in Jesus' Name, amen.

