

The Gospel of God

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[0 : 0 0] But if we could, this evening, for a short while, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Matthew chapter 11.

Matthew chapter 11. And if we read the closing words of that chapter from verse 25, where Jesus is speaking or declaring, as it says.

Matthew 11 and verse 25. At that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

[1 : 1 1] Last Sunday evening, you remember, we began a short series entitled Vision 2024.

Vision 2024. Because as we said, as we go into 2024, we need a vision for 2024. As Solomon said, without vision, the people perish.

Therefore, we need a gospel vision, and we need a gospel vision for this year, for 2024. And as we mentioned last week, as a denomination, our denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, we have adopted the vision statement, a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.

And as we said, some might be cynical, or suspicious, or skeptical, or even shut their minds off to these things. But when you actually stop and think about it, is it not the case that we want to be a healthy gospel church in our community?

We want to be a healthy gospel church in Barbas. We want to be a church that loves Jesus and loves people. We want to be a church that's warm and welcoming to the people of our community.

[2 : 1 9] We want to be a church that sees souls in our community, saved by the grace of God. Therefore, we should want to possess and practice a suitable and a scriptural vision for our day and generation.

We should want to possess and practice Vision 2024. As I mentioned, as office bearers, we've been working on producing a development plan for our congregation, which you might have read already.

There's a link for it on our notices, and it's on our website. We were going to go through it tonight, but God willing, we'll look at it next week. But maybe you're thinking, well, why do we need a development plan?

Mardo, why do we need a development plan in Barbas? But you know, when you actually stop and think about it, God had a development plan. He had a plan of salvation to redeem and rescue lost sinners from damnation and hell.

Jesus had a development plan for his own church because he shared that development plan with his disciples. He said to them, you are to be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth.

[3 : 32] And even the Apostle Paul, he had a development plan too because he went on three missionary journeys to particular places and to significant cities in order to establish and to expand the church of Jesus Christ.

And so you look at the Bible and you think, well, there's nothing new in a development plan. It's not something that the free church has just invented or implemented. It has been there throughout the history of the church of Jesus Christ, which is why we need a development plan for 2024 and beyond.

We need Vision 2024. And as we saw last week, our vision must begin with the glory of God. A vision must always begin with the glory of God because the glory of God, as you know, is our chief end.

Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Therefore, we need to plead and pray with Moses, as we saw from Exodus 33 last week.

We need to plead and pray, Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. That's what we need to see, first and foremost, to see the glory of God. We need to have a passionate pursuit for God's glory and that God's glory would be displayed and demonstrated in our lives as we live in our community.

[4 : 54] And so Vision 2024 must begin with a glimpse of the glory of God. But this evening, I want us to see that Vision 2024 also needs for us to grasp the gospel of God.

We need to grasp the gospel of God. We need a glimpse of the glory of God, but we also need to grasp the gospel of God. And in these famous and also very familiar words of Matthew 11, we find Jesus praying here, we find him preaching, and we find Jesus pleading.

And he's praying, preaching, and pleading that we will grasp the gospel of God. Jesus is praying, preaching, and pleading that we will grasp the gospel of God.

Because in this passage, verses 25 to 30 that we're looking at this evening, in this passage, Jesus reminds us of three things about the gospel. Jesus says that the gospel is a gracious call, it's a godly choice, and it's a great command.

The gospel is a gracious call, a godly choice, and a great command. So first of all, we see, or Jesus shows us, the gospel is a gracious call.

[6 : 11] The gospel is a gracious call. Look at verse 25. We read that at that time, Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. Now, one of the best books I've ever read is a book by Sinclair Ferguson called The Whole Christ.

The Whole Christ. And I'm sure I've mentioned it to you before, and I mentioned it to you again, not just that you'll read it, but also because The Whole Christ is all about answering this question. What is the gospel?

What is the gospel? And as Sinclair Ferguson, as he explains, and as he emphasizes, the gospel is something that has been discussed, and even debated for centuries, throughout church history.

In fact, the historical basis for Sinclair Ferguson, writing his book about the gospel, was a controversy about the gospel. It was a controversy about the gospel that took place in the 18th century, called, boys and girls, The Marrow Controversy.

[7 : 21] It was The Marrow Controversy. And it was called The Marrow Controversy because it was a controversy about a book. Another book you could read. Another book written by Edward Fisher in a previous century, the 17th century.

And the book was called, The Marrow of Modern Divinity. Very fascinating book to read. Very hard book to read, actually. But it's a book all about the essence of the gospel.

And yet, The Marrow of Modern Divinity was a book that was even banned by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1720. And it was banned because the Church of Scotland claimed that this book, The Marrow of Modern Divinity, was antinomian, and it was Arminian.

But when you actually read the book, nothing could be further from the truth. Hence, the reason for The Marrow Controversy. There was a Marrow Controversy over a book called The Marrow of Modern Divinity.

One of the key players in The Marrow Controversy was the Scottish Presbyterian preacher and pastor, Thomas Boston. And at the time, Thomas Boston, he was a minister down in the Scottish borders.

[8 : 30] That's where he first found this book, The Marrow of Modern Divinity. He found it in a window. Sitting in a window, when he was conducting a pastoral visit in the home of one of his parishioners, he found The Marrow of Modern Divinity sitting there.

He actually found two books, but one of them he didn't take anything to do with. But he liked The Marrow of Modern Divinity. And as a preacher and pastor, Thomas Boston, he was this great advocate for the free offer of the gospel.

In fact, Thomas Boston, he wrote another brilliant book. So here's three books for you tonight that you can all go out and buy tomorrow morning. Another brilliant book about preaching the free offer of the gospel Boston wrote was, it was called The Art of Man Fishing.

Great title. The Art of Man Fishing. So it's another book well worth a read. But the major question that The Marrow controversy raised was, how are we to preach the gospel?

How are we to preach and proclaim the gospel? How are we to communicate and convey the gospel to lost sinners? And Boston emphasized and Boston explained that the gospel is a gracious call to come to Christ.

[9 : 45] Boston said that Christ is to be offered to everyone, everywhere, without exception or qualification. Christ is to be offered to everyone, everywhere, without exception or qualification.

And in his book, quoting the Puritan, John Peston, Thomas Boston writes, he's quoting someone, and he says, go and tell every man without exception that here is good news for him.

Christ is dead for him. And if we take him and accept of his righteousness, we shall have him. Go and tell every man without exception there is good news for him.

Christ is dead for him. And if he will take him and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him. But you know, the issue of the Marrow Controversy was about our understanding of God's grace in the gospel.

But what Sinclair Ferguson emphasizes and what all these Puritans emphasize is that Jesus Christ is the gospel. Jesus Christ is the gospel.

[10 : 55] Therefore, the gospel is a gracious call not to follow a religion or to follow a set of rules. No, the gospel is a gracious call to follow a person, to follow the person of Jesus Christ, because the gospel is Jesus Christ.

The gospel is all about and includes the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus Christ, because Jesus is the gospel.

Therefore, preaching the gospel is preaching the whole Christ. You're not leaving any of him out. And as Boston says, the whole Christ is to be offered to everyone, everywhere, without exception or qualification.

But of course, if we want to know how to communicate and how to convey that gospel, then it's always helpful to ask, well, how did Jesus preach and proclaim his own gospel?

How did Jesus preach and proclaim his own gospel? That's why we turn to Matthew 11 this evening, because here we have an example of Jesus here. You could see that he's engaged in evangelistic preaching.

[12 : 08] And the first thing we find Jesus doing here is he's praying. Jesus quotes his preaching in prayer. Because as you know, the life and ministry of Jesus, it was full and fragrant by prayer.

But here Jesus, he's praying. And he's praying according to the gracious will of his Father. He says, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. And so as a preacher, Jesus is, he's praying according to the gracious will of his Father. Because the Father's gracious will, as we read there, his gracious will is to hide the gospel from the wise and understanding, but reveal the gospel to little children.

So he hides it from the wise and the understanding, but reveals it to little children, which at first reading might seem quite confusing. But what Jesus meant by this is that the person with an earthly education and worldly wisdom, as you know, they often take pride in their knowledge to the point that, and I've met so many people like it, they think that they're too intellectual and too intelligent for God and for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And you hear it all the time. You hear people say to me all the time, we know much more now than we did in the past because we have science. And science, well, that has disproved God.

[13 : 47] Therefore, you'd have to be naive or you'd have to be stupid to believe in a God that you cannot see and to follow a failure like Jesus Christ. And of course, the outcome of earthly education and worldly wisdom is that it makes people self-righteous.

It makes them self-satisfied. I don't need Jesus. I don't need the gospel. It makes them self-centered. I am God and there is no other. Which is why the will of the Father is to hide the gospel from them.

Now, that's not to say that someone who is intellectual can't be saved. Not at all. But what Jesus is saying is that when it comes to revealing the gospel, the will of the Father is to reveal the gospel to little children.

Little children. Which means that you don't need a diploma. You don't need a doctorate. You don't need a degree to understand the gospel. All you need is childlike faith in Jesus Christ.

All you need is faith that trusts Jesus and takes Jesus at His word. All you need is to depend upon Jesus Christ. To come to Him and cry out to Him for mercy.

[14 : 55] All you need is childlike faith. Therefore, the gracious will of the Father is not that sinners reject the gospel in their pride, but that they will come to the gospel in humility.

That they will come to the gospel who is Jesus Christ. And that they will come to Him on bended knee and confess their need of Him. You know, in his commentary, you know, I find it amazing.

Every week, J.C. Ryle has something to say about the Bible. J.C. Ryle, my good friend J.C. Ryle, he warns against pride that keeps us from Christ. Pride that keeps us from Christ.

And this is what he says. Let us watch against pride in every shape. Pride of intellect. Pride of wealth. Pride in our own goodness.

Pride in our own desserts. Nothing is so likely to keep a man out of heaven and prevent him from seeing Christ as pride. So long as we think we are something, we shall never be saved.

[16 : 04] Let us pray for and cultivate humility. Let us seek to know ourselves aright and to find out our place in the sight of a holy God.

The beginning of the way to heaven, he says, is to feel that we are in the way to hell and be willing to be taught of the Spirit. There is hardly a sentence of our Lord so frequently repeated as he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

We need to humbly come before the gospel. That is Jesus Christ. Because the gospel is a gracious call. A call to come humbly before Jesus.

Secondly, the gospel is a godly choice. So the gospel is a gracious call, but it's also a godly choice. A godly choice. Look at verse 27.

Jesus says, all things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

[17 : 15] As Jesus teaches us to grasp the gospel of God, he moves from praying in verses 25 and 26 to now preaching. And what Jesus preaches in verse 27 is the doctrine of election.

He preaches the doctrine of election. Now as you know, the doctrine of election and the sovereignty of God in salvation, it's a deep mystery. It's a deep mystery that we will never fathom, and we will never figure out.

We'll be looking more at this on Wednesday evening, so come along Wednesday evening. We'll look at Ephesians chapter 3, where Paul teaches us and reminds us about the mystery of the gospel. Because we don't know why some are elect and some are not.

We don't know why some are saved and some are not. We don't know why people who hear the same message in the same building by the same preacher and some are saved and some are still in darkness.

But that's not our business. That's God's business. Because as Jesus said, no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

[18 : 22] And you know, this is something we need to be reminded of again and again. No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

And what Jesus is saying there, and what He's reminding us, and what Paul will tell us on Wednesday evening in Ephesians chapter 3, is that election is all of grace. God's sovereign election is all of grace.

And it has nothing to do with us. Absolutely nothing to do with us. The fact that the God of heaven, who is thrice holy, so far removed from what we are, the fact that God has chosen anyone to be saved, is an act of amazing grace.

Because the reality is, there's absolutely nothing, good or gracious or great about us, that God would choose to save any of us.

We've all sinned, we've all come short of the glory of God. Isaiah reminds us that from the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness in us.

[19 : 28] But the gospel comes to us and says, but God, but God, but God, who is rich in mercy, and out of His great love for lost sinners, He unconditionally elected some to everlasting life according to His grace.

That's the beauty, that's the glory of the gospel. And what's highlighted in Sinclair Ferguson's brilliant book, *The Whole Christ*, is that many people during the 18th century and even to this present day, they have what Sinclair Ferguson described as a deformed Calvinism.

A deformed Calvinism. Rather than possessing and practicing and preaching a reformed Calvinism, which emphasizes that our election is unconditional and all of grace, Sinclair Ferguson said that a deformed Calvinism is one that where the elect who are only sovereignly saved by God, therefore the gospel should only be offered to the elect.

The gospel should only be preached to the elect. A deformed Calvinism says that because all the blessings and all the benefits of the gospel, as we saw from Ephesians chapter 1, and if we're there on Wednesday evening, all these blessings and benefits, regeneration, forgiveness, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification, and eternal inheritance in heaven, a deformed Calvinism says that all these blessings, all these benefits, they only belong to the elect, therefore they shouldn't be freely offered to everyone, everywhere.

They should only be offered to those who are the elect. Well then you stop and you ask the person the question with a deformed Calvinism, who are the elect?

[21 : 15] Who do you see with an E on their head as Spurgeon described? Who are the elect? How do you know who is the elect and who is not? They will say that the elect are those who truly repent.

But sadly, the outcome of a deformed Calvinism teaches, and this is where it goes all wrong, a deformed Calvinism teaches that a sinner must forsake sin before they come to Christ.

A deformed Calvinism teaches that a sinner must forsake sin before they come to Christ. In other words, you must make yourself a better person and you must have better morals and better motives before you come to Christ.

Don't come to Jesus as you are, make yourself better before you come to Him. You need to reform your life and you need to restore your behavior. You need to restrain your habits, whether these habits are drinking or drugs or gambling, whatever it is, sort that out before you come to Christ.

You need to be good enough. You need to know enough. You need to do enough before you come to Jesus Christ for salvation. My friend, that's a deformed Calvinism.

[22 : 34] It's completely and utterly wrong. And sad to say, many people in our communities, they have a deformed Calvinism that keeps them from coming to Christ because they think they need to know more and be better and reform their life before they come to Christ.

But you know, the gospel says to us so clearly, it's in our coming to Christ that we forsake sin and we follow the Savior. It's in our coming to Christ that we forsake sin and we follow the Savior.

More than that, you know, many Christians also have the theology of a deformed Calvinism. And they have this theology of a deformed Calvinism because they're trying so hard to avoid being called an Arminian because they think that if they preach and if they proclaim or if they speak to somebody with the full and free offer of the gospel to everyone everywhere, then you're not a reformed Calvinist.

And they tie themselves in knots, absolute knots, because they're trying to marry together or trying to understand God's sovereignty and salvation and human responsibility.

But what a deformed Calvinist misunderstands is that the gospel is not a religion. The gospel is not a rule book. The gospel is a relationship and it's a relationship with a person.

[24 : 04] Because the gospel, as we said, the gospel is a person. The gospel is Jesus Christ. The gospel is the person of Jesus Christ. And it's only when we come as we are to the person of Jesus Christ that we will experience and we will enjoy all the blessings and all the benefits of salvation through that person, Jesus Christ.

and you know, this is what the Marrow controversy emphasized. That the gospel is not a pattern to learn, but a person to follow. The gospel is not a pattern to learn, but a person to follow.

And that's why Boston wanted to emphasize, go and tell every man without exception that here is good news for him. And my Christian friend, this is what we're to do.

Go and tell every man without exception, here is good news for him. Christ is dead for him. And if he will take him and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him.

Because Christ is to be offered to all men everywhere without exception or qualification. Do you know, my friend, the gospel which Jesus preached and proclaimed is the full and free offer of the gospel to whosoever.

[25 : 22] And the gospel which a reformed Calvinist preaches and proclaims is the full and free offer of the gospel to whosoever. For everyone who comes to Christ for salvation, as Jesus explains here, everyone who comes to Christ for salvation does so because of the sovereign and gracious electing will of God the Father.

Now, the godly choice that God has in election, it doesn't excuse saints from sitting back and it doesn't excuse sinners from staying away.

God's godly choice in election doesn't excuse saints from sitting back and it doesn't excuse sinners from staying away because Christ must.

He must be offered to all people everywhere without exception or qualification. That is our commission.

That is our call upon us. We're to offer the whole Christ because he is the gospel. We're to call people to come to Christ because he is a person.

[26 : 38] The gospel is a person. As the early church father Augustine said, and this is where Sinclair Ferguson gets the name for his book, Augustine said that we are to fully and freely offer to sinners, boys and girls, totus Christus, the whole Christ.

We are to fully and freely offer to sinners, totus Christus, the whole Christ. We offer the whole Christ to sinners because, you know, if we're going to possess and practice a vision in 2024, we need to grasp the gospel and we need to grasp what's on offer to sinners because what's on offer to sinners are not the benefits and blessings of Christ, but Christ himself.

We're not offering the benefits and blessings of Christ to people. We are offering Christ himself because he is the gospel. That's why he commands sinners, saying there in verse 28, come unto me.

Come unto me. This is what we see lastly, that the gospel is a great command. The gospel is a great command. So the gospel is first of all a gracious call.

Jesus teaches us that the gospel is a godly choice and then thirdly, Jesus teaches us that the gospel is a great command. A great command. It says in verse 28, come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[28 : 13] Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

As Jesus teaches us to grasp the gospel, he moves from praying to his father to preaching about the elect to now pleading for sinners to come to him. He pleads for sinners to come to him and Jesus pleads for sinners to come to him because as we've already discovered, the gospel is a portion.

The gospel is Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, he commands us to come to him. Come unto me.

You know, the gospel isn't about being saved from sin. The gospel is about having Jesus Christ as your savior. The gospel isn't just about escaping the furnace and the fires of hell.

The gospel is about Jesus Christ bearing our hell on the cross. The gospel isn't just about trying to live a holy life. The gospel is actually about living in union with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 26] The gospel is not just about getting to heaven when you die. No, the gospel is about being with Christ in heaven which as Paul says is far better.

There are subtle differences but they make all the difference because they emphasize to us that the gospel is not a pattern to learn but a person to follow. It's a person.

It's not a religion we're offering. It's not a rule book we're setting out for people. It's a relationship. We want people to have a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. We want them to know Him and to love Him and to follow Him.

That's why Jesus says to them and to us so clearly in the gospel come unto me. Come to me. And notice Jesus is not commanding us to come to church.

He's not commanding us to come to a congregation. He's not commanding us to come to a clergyman. He's not commanding us to come to another Christian. The gospel is a great command to come to this person.

[30 : 29] The person of Jesus Christ come unto me. And what I love about the way Jesus speaks here is that with this gospel command in verse 28 Jesus reminds us about all the gospel imperatives in the Bible because there are many gospel imperatives.

Many times where Jesus Christ graciously calls us and commands us to come to Him. So we can't hide behind the doctrine of election.

Do you know I remember working as a young I've told you this story before when I was a young Christian newly converted and I wanted everybody to be saved. I still want everybody to be saved.

And I said to my tradesman why aren't you a Christian? His response to me was the doctrine of election. If I'm going to be saved I'll be saved. There's nothing I can do about it.

And I was stumped. I thought what on earth do you say to that? But you know Jesus teaches us that when we grasp the gospel yes there's the godly choice of God on the one hand but there's also the great command of the gospel on the other.

[31 : 41] And the great command of the gospel is a command full of imperatives. Full of gospel imperatives to whosoever. And I love those imperatives.

Isaiah loved those imperatives. Jesus loved those imperatives. Paul loved those imperatives. Where they write them again and again come and look and live and ask and seek and knock and call and claim and confess and follow.

They're all gospel imperatives which issue this great command of the gospel to come to this person for salvation. To come to Christ for salvation.

It's a full and free offer to whomsoever. Because as Boston said the gospel or as even Christ is to be offered to all men everywhere without exception or qualification.

And that's what Jesus did. He offered himself to all men everywhere without exception or qualification. And my friend that's what Jesus is still doing tonight.

[32 : 50] He's still offering himself to everyone everywhere without exception or qualification. Whether you're here or at home tonight Jesus Christ is offering himself to you fully and freely in the gospel.

And what does he say to you? Come unto me. Come unto me.

My friend the gospel is a gracious call. It's a godly choice and it's a great command and it's offered to everyone everywhere without exception or qualification.

So Jesus is saying to us tonight come come come unto me. And as a congregation with a vision vision 2024 what is our call as we leave this place we say to people come come see a man who told me all things that I ever did.

is this not the Christ? We call people to come to him because he is the gospel.

[34 : 18] May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord we marvel at thy goodness and thy grace towards us that we have a gospel at all and that the gospel is thy son the Lord Jesus that he is good news.

O Lord we thank thee for him. We thank thee that he's revealed to us on the pages of scripture. We thank thee that he's proclaimed in our hearing. And Lord we pray that we as thy people we would go and tell.

We would go and tell about this Jesus and speak about him that he is the person to follow to come to this Christ who promises that even when we are heavy laden and when we have all our cares and concerns that he promises to give us rest.

Lord bless us then we pray. Bless us as we go into another week. A week that is unknown to any of us. But Lord we give thanks that this is where we are found and this is what we are doing.

That we are seeking thee to bless us as we go into the week ahead. Go before us and we ask. Cleanse us we plead. For we ask it in Jesus name and for his sake.

[35 : 34] Amen. We're going to bring our service to our conclusion. This evening we're going to sing the words of Psalm 65.

Psalm 65 it's in the Sing Psalms version. On page 82 Psalm 65 we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked five.

Psalm 65 Sing Psalms version page 82. But before we sing usual story you have four questions.

So question one what was the controversy in the 18th century? The marrow controversy. Yeah. Well done. What is the gospel?

Is it a person, a place or a proclamation? A person. Yeah. So we proclaim a person. Who is the gospel for? Everyone.

[36 : 45] And what does totus Christus mean? The whole Christ. We preach the whole Christ. Well done. Well done. So we're singing Psalm 65 from the beginning down to the verse marked five.

As we said all our Psalms they focus upon the theme all people. And it says there in verse one. In Zion praise awaits you Lord. To you our vows will pay.

To you all people will come near. You hear us when we pray. When we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay. You pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away.

Down to the verse marked five. We'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise. In Zion praise awaits you Lord.

To you our vows will pay. To you all people will come near.

[37 : 56] You heal us when we pray. when we were overwhelmed by sins and guilt upon us lay.

You pardoned all our trespasses and washed our guilt away.

How blessed are those you choose and bring within your courts of praise.

praise. We're filled with sins in your house in your most holy place.

With all CHANG earth Our Saviour, full of earth is and all the earth abroad.

[39 : 52] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.