

The Multi-Dimensional Gospel

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This Spring we are taking a break from our series *Saints Together*. The reason is that there are more pressing needs to address in our church. What are they? Austin is a young, transient city. As a result, we have a very committed core, but considerable turnover every 2-3 years. [I'd like to challenge you to stay in our rapidly growing city. We need more people, and leaders, who are passionate about living out the gospel to renew our city.] Now, because of transience, we need to acquaint and reacquaint you with our vision. If you've joined us in the past two years, you've haven't heard a vision series. So you've tried to pick it up here and there or by osmosis. If you're an old-timer, there's a good chance you've had vision drift. And if you're exploring Christianity, this is a great time to find out what Christianity is really all about. *City Life church exists to renew cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus*. Over the next 10 weeks, we'd like to show you how that works. This morning, we begin with that phrase, *the Gospel of Jesus*. The **gospel** is deeper than we know, broader than we think, and bigger than we can imagine. You might say it's *multidimensional*, like the Tardis. The Tardis is a time travel device used by Dr. Who, a British sci-fi character. Now what you need to know about the tardis is that it is actually bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. If you open the door and walk in you'll find numerous rooms that account for much more space that is visually possible when looking at the Tardis from the outside. The gospel is like this. It can appear to be rather small, simple, when seen from the outside, but when you open the doors and step inside you discover more than you'd ever imagine. Ephesians 1 shows us three dimensions, three perspectives of the gospel, that when grasped, open up to a whole new world of possibility. Ephesians 1:13-14: "*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory*." The gospel is 1) the word of truth, deeper than we know 2) a Seal of the Spirit, broader than think 3) and a guaranteed inheritance, bigger than we imagine.

Word of Truth

The word of truth, the gospel means "verbal announcement." Not all announcements carry this weight, "a word of truth," even if they are true. A birth announcement is important and true—new life is here—but we would never say, "I have a word of truth for you today, my baby was born." There are 360,000 births a day, 130 million a year. Your baby's birth is important, but does she deserve the moniker, *word of truth*? There is one announcement that deserves more press than any other: *the gospel of Jesus Christ*. That's the claim here, that the gospel is *the* word of truth not *a* word of truth. In verse 4, it stretches back before the world began. You might say it's the oldest, greatest, deepest *drama*. What's a drama? In a broad sense, it's an enacted story that narrates a way of looking at life, from a particular point of view. The drama of individualism is that life is a story about you. The drama of secularism that life is a story about what you think. Materialism, about what you have, and postmodernism, about what you feel. These dramas announce a way of living in the world, a right way, even if they won't admit it. Novelist Dorothy Sayers said, "*The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man*." Why? Ephesians 1

gives it to us in bullet point fashion. If you really want to be staggered, read the Gospel of Matthew this afternoon or the whole Bible this year. I'm just gonna try to fit in 8 verses into three sentences. The word "drama" means action. Verse 3 shows us the actors: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us" (and in verse the 13, the Spirit). *The Father, Son & Holy Spirit (the Trinity) conspire to bless us.* (Bless is a word for grace, important later.) Verse 4-6: *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.* What's the action? *The Father, out of his adopting love, brought us into his family to raise us in true humanity (holy and blameless.)* Verse 7: *In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace.* In Christ we have redemption, it means *ransom*. In his fascinating book, *The Man with the Black Hat*, pop culture critic and aficionado Chuck Klosterman argues that "*the most villainous move any person can make is tying a woman to the railroad tracks.*" Why? Because sheer innocence meets utter horror. The thought of a woman being cut in two by a train. In old Westerns, it's often done to get a ransom. Jesus is the woman on the tracks. Sheer innocence broken in two by utter horror. Now why did he do it? Why didn't he break the ropes? To pay the ransom of course, to meet the demands of the Law, "because all have sinned...and the wages of sin is death" (6:23). Now who's the villain, well that's you and me. God-neglecting sinners. Verse 7 tells us: *The Son, out of his boundless grace, was tied to the tracks for our ransom.* Sheer innocence meets utter horror for total forgiveness. Debt paid. We'll come back to verse 13, *the Spirit, in his holy presence, seals us for a glorious inheritance.* Who are the primary actors here? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit conspiring for our good, a Trinitarian production of undeserved grace. A cosmic drama. You see, life is not a story about us, what we think, what we have, or what we feel. Life is a story about God, what he thinks, what he has, what he does, and what he feels! It's theodrama not an egodrama, where we take center stage. Why did they cut me off? Why doesn't my wife stop nagging me? Why don't I get paid more? Why doesn't my husband show me more attention? Why hasn't God given me a spouse, a job, a better house or child? **We cast ourselves as the hero or as the victim in the play called life, but never as the villain. We're not nearly as honest or as good as the Trinity.** Enter *the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation.* What's salvation? *It's a rescue operation that retells the story, changes our identity.* The drama's grand and its deep. We need a *real* hero to rescue us from our egotrip—finger pointing victim or chest beating hero, the woe is me or look at me. We need a story that looks, rivets, on Christ. Because: *In him we have a ransom through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of his grace.* There's a scene in the movie *Minority Report* where Tom Cruise has to change his identity in order to clear his name. You know what he does? Surgically alters his eyeball, and uses a drug to distort his face. That's what we're doing when we insist on the identity of victim or hero. But God wants a better identity for you—daughter and son—he died to give it to you, and you don't have to contort your face. We just have step off center stage, stop our complaining, chestbeating, and look at the tracks, at the one true victim, Jesus Christ our Lord. A group of intellectuals were debating the merits of world religions when C.S. Lewis walked in. They asked him, "What makes Christianity unique?" He said, "That's easy, it's grace." **Grace is God entering his own drama to die for the villain to give him a whole new identity.**

Live in it! Son, daughter, recipient of grace. See, life isn't a story about us; it's a profound drama about Christ, it's grand and its deep. Which is why Paul says over and over its all, "to the praise of his glorious grace." Some people get bent out of shape when its all about God's glory, but when you see a great performance, what do you do? Do you jump on stage and say they couldn't have done it without me? I bought the ticket. No, we leap to our feet for a standing ovation, thrilled by the artist's performance. We don't even hesitate to praise them. Why? Because we've reveled in their grace and seen their glory. Look at Christ. The more you revel in the gospel, the more you'll praise his glorious grace.

Seal of the Spirit

It's deeper than we know; it's broader than we think. Unfortunately, the egodrama has also affected our view of church. *Many Christians think of the church, not as a theater of the gospel, where God's story unfolds, but as the theatre of Self, where our needs are met.* This often unconscious. We treat church like any business. The customer is always right. We expect this expository preaching, an intimate small group, unflagging mercy ministry, great theology, a kids ministry just the way we want it, all with little personal accountability or contribution. This is all wrong because it builds church from me up, instead of from Christ down, what the church does instead of what it is. Ephesians insists we think of the church in terms of what it is. Not what can I get from it, but how can I be it. Ephesians: "[In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.](#)" Plural pronouns. We, we, we, all sealed together with the Holy Spirit. Sealing has less to do with making *you* watertight, and more to do with marking *us* with a stamp. It a sign of ownership, like the seal of a letter that bears the authority of the author. *The Spirit of God is the corporate mark that designates the people of God under the authority of Christ.* In other words, the Spirit creates a family resemblance, a particular type of community. What kind? A redemptive community that forgives like Christ forgives, serves like Christ serves, speaks like Christ speaks. When Christ becomes the *functional, actual* center of our lives, our whole approach to church changes. And we see the church, not the dispenser of spiritual services, but as the display of the gospel of Jesus. You relate to one another in gospel doctrine. [When hurt, you pursue reconciliation. That's what Jesus did from the tracks. When you see someone in need, you deny yourself and give. Grace. When someone's acting the victim or hero, the gospel frees you to stop thinking about yourself and lovingly give them the word of truth.] Invite them back into the gospel drama, where Christ is centerstage not them, and to act in line with their identity: servant, son, daughter, forgiver. BUT there are competing doctrines, dramas that shape our identity, that narrate our interaction with the church. Instead of a gospel-centered, Jesus-shaped life, we often prefer a "meaningful" life. NYT columnist, David Brooks, describes a meaningful life as one characterized by serving others that leads to a feeling of significance. Its what you *feel* when you're serving things beyond yourself. Meaningfulness, he says, is built entirely on emotion. Who's to say what's meaningful? You, its entirely subjective. Guess what, when church doesn't feel meaningful anymore you move on, you slide out, stop worshipping, serving, growing. People who achieved great things in history, like Mandela or Lincoln, didn't do it "to bathe luxuriously in their own sense of meaningfulness." They did it because "they had objective and eternally true standards. They had a moral framework. Meaningfulness is mushy, emotional, and unreliable. It takes a knife to the

mark of the Spirit and tries to pry it off, making no room for gospel-compelled witness, Jesus-like character, or Spirit-created community. It's a doctrine of the Self. But the word of truth keeps Christ in the center, the embodiment of a moral framework, eternal standards, the one true Human. If we're all bound to him in the Spirit, it has a radicalizing effect. Because, it means **there are no spiritual elites. Everyone is empowered to give grace and truth.** We're all physicians, commissioned to apply the gospel cure to one another's sick egotistical, shallow, doctrinaire, comfortable lives. Some will be clumsier than others. All the more reason to get serious about what you believe, sign up for City Seminary, get real in your Fight Club, ask for help, and grow in gospel doctrine. **The gospel and the church go together like cast and script to live out the drama of redemption in the power of the Spirit.** Its broader than we think.

A Guaranteed Inheritance

Finally, the gospel bigger than we imagine (A promised Inheritance). Let's take a look at our final phrase: [In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.](#) What's the promise? A fat inheritance. The word is used in the OT to refer to a promised land, in the NT it's the renewed creation. The gospel drama come to a crescendo, where all things are made new, just, right, not based on meaningfulness but on the return of Jesus Chrst. How do you know someone has a fat inheritance? You can tell by the way the live now. Think of Paris Hilton, spending money like there's an endless supply. Why? Her daddy has secured a big inheritance. In a similar way, how we live now tells the world something about our inheritance. It's a little different than Hilton's. We've received so much more—a new creation—that we have endless grace to give away. The Spirit guarantees us the world, so we have nothing to lose. He's the deposit, the foretaste. Now, you say, I still think that's hard. And you're right. We have vision drift, settle for meaning, play the victim. So we need more than new creation. We need Christ, we need total redemption so that our every impulse is to act as brothers, sisters, sons, servants. We need that kind of hope, promise, power in the present. That's exactly what the Spirit is, a guaranteed, downpayment, trailer of the future, if you rely on him and not feeling, if you believe his word of truth and not the word of victim or hero. Don't quench the Spirit with false gospels. Ask him to make you a trailer of the true gospel, the grand and deep drama. Read the Bible to remind yourself who you are. Approach church as Spirit-marked community who you share the gospel with. Don't settle for a sentimental life, a fading church attender. You were marked for the day of redemption, given a fat inheritance of God's glorious grace. Spend it. Splash in it. Share it. Give it away in Christ. *This is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man. God entering the drama, dying for villains, to give us a whole new identity and a whole new creation:* ["he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth"](#) (10). Heaven will overlap with earth, in a glorious inheritance, to the praise of his glorious grace. Spend the inheritance, show the trailer, be a people marked by the Spirit as a display of the gospel.