

Luke 16:14-18
The Whole-Life Gospel

Intro: Are you all up for a challenge this week? If you are a Christian this should not be hard. As you leave today, find one person this week and share the gospel with them. Easy stuff, right?

Some of you are really nervous, some are excited probably. You may already have a person or place in mind but when I say “share the gospel” —what are you going to say? What’s the message?

Some of you may share your testimony. That fine as long as your story ultimately points to Christ’s story. Others may have an arsenal of verses from Romans (3:23; 5:1), or Jn 3:16. Some may just say “y’all need Jesus.”

In this short passage, gospel proclamation is the center (v16)

- For some Christians when they hear the phrase “sharing the gospel” or “preaching the gospel” they focus narrowly on the cross and forgiveness. That is certainly the focal point, but it’s not the whole picture of the gospel.

Whole- Life Gospel definition: God’s action through Jesus to *redeem, reconcile, and rule* a chosen people for his eternal glory and their unending joy.

- This whole-life gospel is found in
(Col 1:13-14)

¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- The category of whole-life gospel also means that some can settle for a half-life gospel (e.g wanting Christ to bless my parenting, job, etc.,...but don’t touch my money or tell me how to be a loving husband).

- Whole-gospel living touches *every area of our lives*

1. Whole-life gospel and money (v14-15)

- In vs 15 Jesus responds to critics who have nothing but contempt for what he says.
- We get a peek into what makes them tick. It wasn't just that they loved money. No, they also loved to have people turn their heads.
- Plus, being rich in Jewish culture often appeared to others as having God's blessings. Think of Job.

Now obviously money can be a means to one end: pleasure. It feels good to buy stuff and move to bigger and better. Recall the parable of the Rich Fool (Ch 12). Sometimes our sinful hearts just crave an upgrade. But money can be another means to an end: it makes us look really good before others.

I can still visualize something I saw 20 years ago or so. I was in my teens and stopped at an intersection in Pittsburgh. In front of me were two really new Corvettes with their t-top roofs open. The drivers were men in their 30's decked out in expensive suits; each had a beautiful woman seated in the passenger seat, probably going on an expensive date. As soon as the light turned green they peeled off in their Vetts. I remember in my youthful imagination thinking, those guys are studs. They've made it. Listen to what Jesus says about that stupidity: "For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

In other words, the things that we might be tempted to buy—certain brands of clothing, car, type of house—if we do it to turn heads, we are fools. And always let's remember the timeless truth: "God knows your hearts." He knows why I crave the purchase or upgrade.

2. Whole life gospel and morals (v16-17)

- Christianity is a moral faith. Followers of Jesus are called to live and behave in a certain way.
- What Jesus says in v16 is that a new era of redemptive history is in place, similar to Mk 1:14.

(Mk 1:14)

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

- In a general way, the Bible can be divided into two parts: promise (OT)/fulfillment (NT). John the Baptist serves as a bridge between the two.

Next, we have a difficult phrase about the kingdom (v16)

- “everyone forces his way into it”
- This could also be translated another way (taken passively); “everyone is forcefully urged into it” (ESV footnote); (CSB) “everyone is urgently invited to enter it.”
- Contextually, this seems to fit the picture of God in Lk 15 (Prodigal Son) doesn’t it? The Father who urges and pleads with his son’s heart.
- Or the picture of the banquet in 14:21-24.

There is a compelling invitation to be part of God’s kingdom.

The picture of God in Scripture is that he devotes himself to his people *wholeheartedly*. A God with whole-hearted devotion would expect nothing less from his people.

- Question: how do people show whole-hearted devotion to God? That’s a question I had as a very young Christian.
- The statement Jesus makes here is similar to (Mt 5:17-18). Jesus did not come to abolish law and prophets but fulfill them.
- Fulfill basically means to bring to intended purpose. *In Christ, the promises of God are realized and his people pointed to a path of purity.* And our path to purity is laid out in God’s Law, that’s why its validity continues (v17).

Principle: The law was not given to show the minimum we can do for God.

Often, when people get around a law enforcement person they ask a question, “how fast can I really drive?” They hope there is a margin of grace. One State Trooper said this: “you can drive as fast as you can afford.” Some can wrongly look at God’s law the same way, that there is a “grace margin” built into it.

Look at NT perspective on law

(Gal 5:13-14)

¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Keep reading (5:19-23) “against such things there is no law!” In other words, there is no cap or limit on love, joy, peace, etc. Living as a whole-gospel person means looking at the law, not with grace margins, but through the lenses of love.

Why should we want to help the poor generously? Because that’s what love does. Why do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8)? Love does that. Why be a person who keeps commitments? Because that’s what love does, and a whole- life gospel demands.

3. Whole life gospel and marriage (v18)

- Jesus gives us a practical example of keeping the law through the lens of love.
- To help with flow of thought we can mentally put in the word “for example” in front of v18.
- The short and straightforward of what Jesus says: *divorce is not part of God’s plan for you.*
- This is God’s ideal when he created marriage (Gen 2)
- Jesus gave a similar response to the Pharisees (Mt 19:3-6)—who had twisted Dt 24:1 to permit divorce for any reason.

³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” ⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother

and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

- From Eph 5:31-32, we get the truth about marriage; marriage is a mystery that points to Christ and his church. The story is as dramatic as it is true. Christ leaves his father, pursues a bride, and pays a price (blood) to love and treasure her into eternity.

Just like marriage, the relationship between Christ and his church is *covenantal*. It's binding. It's not meant to be broken. Do you want a Savior who, if you make one mistake too many, will say "pack up and leave?" Or, if there is someone who is a more interesting person and has more potential than you down the road, then it's over; you are on your own. Or, do you want one who stays unconditionally committed out of his covenantal love to you?

What we say about our marriage commitment is what we ultimately say about Christ.

(John Piper from *This Momentary Marriage*)

"The highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenantal relationship of Christ and his church on display"

Therefore, getting married *and staying married* is not mainly about staying in love, but about keeping the law of Christ and covenant keeping.

Christ holds his people to a standard that he has lived by his own example of unending faithfulness, which leads to his people's unending joy.

Application: Past, Present, Preparation

Past: No doubt some have a past. Some may still feel the sting and the shame of divorce.

Churches have people with a past of broken covenants and promises. Christ who spoke these words also speak words of forgiveness. His redeeming grace covers past sins.

Present: If you are planning to be married soon, or are currently married, have the words of Christ etched in your heart: God's plan for your life is not for your divorce. "What God has joined together, let not man separate."

Preparation—Many are singles here. That’s ok. Singleness is a gift (1 Cor 7:7), whether for a season or all of life. Here is the one piece of wisdom. Prepare to be a covenant keeping person who can hold a promise for the rest of your life. Don’t try to be the perfect mate or find the perfect mate, just focus on keeping your promises.

Finally, the ultimate goal in life...the ultimate fulfillment is not to have marriage, *but to have Christ.*

Conclusion:

Right before Emily and I got married, I took an extra job mowing greens at a golf course. I heard that my supervisor was a Christian, but never really had a conversation with him. Until one day he pulled me aside. He said, “I heard you are about to get married.” “Yes” I responded. He went on to tell me how he had a previous marriage when he was younger that ended in a horrible divorce. Then he stressed: “*It was because I did not have Christ at the center of my life.*” I can still hear his 6 words of wisdom today: *always keep Christ at the center.*

What he was saying to me was gospel. God has acted in Christ to redeem, reconcile and rule over my life for his eternal glory and my unending joy. Keeping Christ at the center is essential.

Friends, the same is true today. Whether money, morals, or marriage, *Always Keep Christ* at the center.

Live a whole-gospel life.