

Softball Devotional #1:

What is the Gospel?

(1 min) Introduction and prayer

(10 mins) Icebreaker/Opening Discussion:

- Break off into small groups of about 6 people trying to get about an even split of people from each team in each group
- Do a simple get-to-know-people's-names game
 - Example: Get people to go around sharing their **name, profession/course of study**, something they want to **learn this summer** (can be anything) and **what they think the Christian Gospel is**.

(10 mins) Message on "What is the Gospel?"

Imagine a bit with me. Imagine that you are on the top floor of a building that is burning from the top down. Due to the alarm system failure, you are tasked with running to the lower floors to tell people to quickly evacuate the building. After you dash to a couple floors below, you walk in seeing people completely oblivious to the fire ravaging the floors above. What do you do? Do you try to convince them that there is a fire upstairs? Do you drag them down to safety with you? Do you plead and plead with them, but receiving no response hurry on to the next floor in hopes of saving some? Or do you casually chat with them and point to the exit without telling them of the fire above? What would you do?

The Christian Gospel is very similar. We have an urgent and important message to deliver to all those around us. The root word for Gospel is the Greek word, "evangelion", which literally means "Good message" or "Good News". At the very heart of the Christian message is good news, despite any stereotypes of Christians that you may have heard. So then we must ask, "What is this good news and why is it 'good'?" Pastor John Piper once defined the Christian Gospel to be the good news that Jesus Christ the righteous one died for our sins and in three days, rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe but only everlasting joy. The heart of the Gospel message lies in the person of Jesus Christ.

The whole message begins and ends with Jesus. In John 1:1-14, the Apostle John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" At the very beginning of time, at the dawn of creation, Jesus (who was God's word to us) was. But he didn't just exist; he was also holy and righteous. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Jesus knew no sin because he was righteous. What does it mean to be righteous? Being righteous means utter obedience to the commands of God. Anything you think, say or do that breaks God's commands is what God calls sin in His Word, the Bible. And because God is righteous, He cannot tolerate sin and must justly punish it.

Enter humans. There is just something about our disposition that seems to encourage us to rebel against God. Consequently, our punishment for our sin is eternal separation from God. Romans 6:23 tells us that

the wages of sin is death, spiritual death—separation from God. Wages imply that we earn this condemnation from God because we cannot live up to His standard of right. Try as hard as we may, it is impossible to live a life worthy enough of God's righteousness. While many of you might be thinking "Oh, I've never killed anyone, never stolen a car or robbed a bank, so I must be good", Jesus challenges us to say that even hating your brother is equivalent to murder and looking lustfully at a woman is akin to adultery. Jesus is saying that sin isn't just the big stuff but also our thoughts and attitudes. And this sin accumulates as debt to this righteous God, a debt we cannot even begin to pay.

At this point in the Gospel message, things seem pretty bleak. We as humans cannot seem to stop sinning or violating God's commands and consequently, it seems that we leave God with no other choice but to punish us. And what a punishment indeed! Eternal damnation! This is like the fire at the top of the burning building, coming down to consume all in its path. Is there hope?

But in spite God's righteousness, and our deserved punishment for sin, He also loves us very much and desires for us to be reconciled to Him - to know Him and be known by Him. And now here is the kicker. In Hebrews 9:22, we find that for God, "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin." He requires a pure life to be given in exchange for a sinful life. And so in His great love, He sent Jesus Christ, his pure and unblemished son, to die on the cross for ALL our sins to pay the penalty for our wickedness. In so doing, God justly punished the sins of the world on Christ so that whoever believes in Him shall receive forgiveness and be reconciled back to God. This is what Christians call justification. Before God, we have been justified, we have been made right on Christ's account. John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world, that he sent his one and only son so that whoever believes in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life, everlasting fellowship with God.

So when you believe in Christ, you are declared righteous of all your sins because Christ has taken the penalty for you - His righteousness has become your righteousness, and all of your sins have been forgiven. It is like if I were to receive a heavy fine for speeding. As a student, I have no way to pay this fine plus all the damages and court charges. So before the judge, I am guilty. But then, my father steps up and in love and compassion, offers to pay the debt I owed to the judge. Upon receiving the payment, I am no longer guilty before the judge. My debt has been paid. And so it is with Christ and our sins, in a much deeper and profound way.

The moment we believe in Jesus and choose to follow Him, we embark on a journey to grow in our knowledge of Him by study and by action. God has revealed Himself to us through the Bible, so we must study it by ourselves and with older and more mature believers. In the Bible, God has taught us His way of living: a way of peace, of love, of sacrifice, of hardship, of joy and of security in Christ. And so we follow His way. Life after believing in Christ does not suddenly become easier. If anything, it becomes harder. Like all good things in life, we must strive hard to work out our salvation so that we may grow into the likeness of Christ. And while life is hard, as Christians, we have hope in the midst of this difficulty called life that God will abide with us if we abide with Him. And that sustains us through all the hardships and difficulties in our lives.

And so, what does this mean to you? If you haven't believed in Christ and haven't chosen to follow Him, there is much to think about. Talk with your governors and coaches about their experiences with God. Observe your Christian friends and try to figure out why they believe. And be honest and sincere with yourself. In Psalm 34:8, the Psalmist writes, "Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed are those that trust in Him." God is indeed good. Think about it. If you have any questions, feel free to chat with me

afterwards or talk with your own governors to find out more about this Jesus whom many have chosen to follow.

And if you have declared your allegiance with Christ and have chosen to follow Him, there is much more to think about. Sometimes as Christians, we feel that the Gospel is only the mechanism through which we get saved and after we are saved, we can put it behind us and go onto more “interesting and deep” things. But no! It is through the Gospel that we are reminded of God’s love for us, His enduring faithfulness for us, His amazing grace towards us and His unrelenting pursuit to be reconciled with us. We never outgrow our need to hear the Gospel. Romans 16:25 tells us that we are strengthened in our faith through the Gospel. So for you Christians here today, are you living a life worthy of the Gospel of grace that you claim to believe?

And for those of you who haven’t believed, I would challenge you to think about it and talk it over with your governors and coaches. If something that was said here today has resonated with your heart, don’t let that conviction go. Come talk with me or with your governors to find out more about this Jesus who loves you so very much. Don’t let this moment go, because as I have said at the beginning, this message is an urgent one. Let’s pray.

If you’d like to discuss these matters further, please feel free to contact me at jonathan.wang@utoronto.ca and I will be happy to chat with you.

Also, all previous devotionals can be found at www.cgygfellowship.com/Devos.shtml