

FIRST THINGS

*Understanding The Core Concepts
In the New Testament*

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by
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Introduction

Imagine that someone asked you "What is the gospel?" or "What are Jesus and the Bible really all about?" or "Why does Jesus matter?". What would you say? What have you said in the past? How do you answer these questions for yourself?

What if you could answer those questions clearly and concisely, with complete confidence that what you said was the truth? What if you knew what "the gospel" or "the message of Jesus" is, as the people in the New Testament did?

"First Things" is an introduction to what the Bible says about:

1. JESUS - Who is Jesus and what was his God-given mission?
2. MESSAGE - What is "the gospel" or "the message" that Jesus and his disciples believed and shared with others?
3. MISSION - What mission did God give the disciples in the New Testament?
4. MOTIVATION - Why was there such passion and urgency in the early disciples to get "the gospel" to people, to the point of enduring persecution and even death?

"The Short Version" is simple, functional and lists key concepts. "The Expanded Version" provides a biblical summary of those concepts, plus sections from the Bible that relate to them.

Please read "First Things" with an open mind and an open heart. Sincere questions, dialogue, disagreement and even agreement are welcome. Feel free to send comments via LivewickMedia.com.

repent

believe

follow

The concepts and words on the following pages are intended to deal honestly and plainly with issues of first importance – or "first things" – as found in the New Testament. It is hoped and expected that there will be conversations, soul-searching, prayer, meditation... and likely some grief, anger and joy... as people read and process what follows. The goal is for us to seek and find the truth together.

Enjoy the journey...

• Part 1: The Short Version •

JESUS

Who is Jesus and what was his God-given mission?

Who

- Son of God/Messiah/Savior Matthew 3.17; John 4.25-26; John 20.31;
Mark 14.61-62; Luke 2.11
- The Word/Message of God John 1.1-14

What

- Testify to the truth John 18.37
- Tell the good news of the kingdom of God Luke 4.43; 9.11; Acts 1.3
- Bring good news to the poor, free prisoners,
give sight to the blind, release the oppressed,
& tell of God's favor Luke 4.16-21
- Seek and to save what was lost Luke 19.9-10
- Take away the sin of the world John 1.29,34; Matthew 9.6
- Give his life as a ransom for many Mark 10.45
- Rise from the dead Mark 8.31-33; 9.31-32

MESSAGE

What is "the gospel" or "the message" that Jesus and his disciples believed and shared with others?

- Jesus is the Messiah (see "Jesus" above)
- Repent Mark 1.14-17; Luke 5.31,32; 13.5; Acts 17.22-31;
20.21; 26.20; 2 Corinthians 7.10; 2 Peter 3.9
- Believe the gospel Mark 1.14-17; John 3.14-18; 5.24; Acts 8.12;
13.26-39; Romans 1.16,17; 4.23-25; 10.8-13;
1 Timothy 1.15,16
- Follow Jesus Mark 1.14-17; Mark 8.34-38; Matthew 4.19;
John 12.23-26; Luke 9.23-26

In a phrase, the message was "Jesus and the kingdom of God" (Acts 8.12).

MISSION

What mission did God give the disciples in the New Testament?

- Make disciples Matthew 28.19-20; Luke 9.1-6; Acts 1.8

MOTIVATION

Why was there such passion and urgency in the early disciples to get "the gospel" to people, to the point of enduring persecution and even death?

Love for God and love for people were their motivation (Matthew 22.37-40; 2 Corinthians 5.14 15)

- Love for God produces obedience to God in what we say and do (John 14.23,24; 15.10-14; Matthew 11.28-30).
- Love for people means we say and do what is best for them, even if it costs us sometimes (Acts 4.18-20; Ephesians 5.1,2).

• Part 2: The Expanded Version •

Jesus

Who is Jesus and what was his God-given mission?

Jesus was and is the Son of God, Savior, Messiah and the message of God to humanity in human form. He - the fullest expression of God ever seen - was called a "friend of sinners". Jesus told his followers that he would be betrayed, beaten, killed and resurrected. After all that happened, he appeared to people to show them he was alive.

Jesus said that he came to earth to pour out his blood so our sins could be forgiven, to give his life as a ransom for many people, to seek and save what was lost and to become for us what we could not get on our own – righteousness, holiness and redemption. He said that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to himself. He also said that he came for judgment, to bring a sword and to bring fire on the earth. The Bible tells us that he came to speak the truth, to tell about the kingdom of God, to create one new humanity and to destroy the devil's work. He came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. After he returned to heaven he sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to live and speak for him.

Following are some sections from the New Testament related to the preceding summary. For a more comprehensive list of scriptures about Jesus and his mission go to:

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Matthew 1.20-21	"Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus , because he will save his people from their sins. "
Matthew 3.17	And a voice from heaven said, " This is my Son , whom I love; with him I am well pleased."
Matthew 9.6	But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."
Matthew 9.12-13	On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. "

MESSAGE

What is "the gospel" or "the message" that Jesus and his disciples believed and shared with others?

Jesus came to earth to speak and live God's message to humanity. The message (simply put) is: Jesus is the Messiah. Repent, believe, follow Jesus and help others do the same.

In other words, Jesus came to free people from sin, oppression and bondage to the kingdom of darkness. He came to bring us into his kingdom of freedom, life and light. He has enabled us to become new creations who are made right with God and no longer fear the day of judgment. We can leave the corruption in the world and enter God's kingdom if we repent, believe and follow Jesus. Biblically these terms mean:

Repent – To repent is to thoughtfully, sincerely choose to turn from (or, die to) sin, self-centered living or serving other gods and turn to Jesus. Repentance takes humility and leads us to knowledge of the truth and to salvation. Repenting is critical to spiritual life and health.

Believe – To believe in Jesus is to put our trust in him as Savior, not simply to believe he exists. Specifically, we are called to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess him as our Lord, or Master. This faith in Jesus is how we become a new creation. Through faith we are justified and made righteous (or made right with God).

Follow – To follow is to yield or submit our lives to God and his ways; to listen to God and obey. Jesus often said "Follow me". He called people to "count the cost" of following him, of taking up their cross (dying to themselves) in order to follow him.

When we repent, believe and follow Jesus we join his body, his army and become part of his family. We have a shared mission to "go, make disciples" together.

Following are some sections from the New Testament related to the preceding summary. For a more comprehensive list of scriptures about the message of the gospel go to:

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Matthew 4.17	From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."
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Matthew 4.19	“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”
Matthew 4.23	Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom , and healing every disease and sickness among the people.
Matthew 7.21-23	“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven , but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’
Matthew 9.35	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.
Matthew 10.39	Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
Matthew 12.36-37	But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted , and by your words you will be condemned.
Matthew 13.18-23	“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. 22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. 23 But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”
Matthew 13.24-30	“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ 28 “ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ 29 “ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. ”
Matthew 13.31-32	“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed , which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”
Matthew 13.33	“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

MISSION

What mission did God give the disciples in the New Testament?

God has given all disciples or followers of Jesus a specific mission to "Go, make disciples." In other words, "follow Jesus and help others follow Jesus".

As those who have repented, believed and now follow Jesus, each of us is called to take up our cross daily. Live the Jesus-centered, new way of life you learned in the gospel. Let God's power flow in you each day so that you stand firm and obey the word of God you have received. Live the truth in love with a good conscience and a sincere faith. Speak the truth – including truth about God's kingdom - plainly and sincerely. Enforce the victory Jesus won over evil spirits, over sickness and over any oppression from the kingdom of darkness in your own life, and in the lives of others as possible. Seek to rescue the perishing as you, too, have been rescued. Help others follow Jesus.

Following are some sections from the New Testament related to the preceding summary. For a more comprehensive list of scriptures about the mission Jesus gave his followers go to:

www.livewickmedia.com/firstthings.html

Matthew 5.13	You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness , how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.
Matthew 5.14-16	You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men , that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
Matthew 10.1	He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.
Matthew 10.7-8	As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.
Matthew 16.24-27	"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul ? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

MOTIVATION

Why was there such passion and urgency in the early disciples to get "the gospel" to people, to the point of enduring persecution and even death?

God has given all disciples or followers of Jesus a specific motivation for getting the gospel message to people. That motivation is loving God and loving people enough to live & speak the truth so they can be saved.

As followers of Jesus, He is master and our lives are his. Because God loves us and we love him, we want to serve him. He wants to live in us and through us to share his message, his salvation and his life with others. So, we share the gospel with others out of love for God.

In addition to love for God, his love for people in us motivates us to reach out to other people to share the gospel. A day of judgment is coming for us all when we will give an account to God for our lives. Some people will be shut out from God's presence and experience eternal punishment. Others will be welcomed into God's presence and experience eternal life. Jesus paid the penalty for sin so that by faith in him we can be saved from God's wrath and be with him forever. He also came to give us greater love, joy, power, community, peace and freedom here and now.

Following are some sections from the New Testament related to the preceding summary. For a more comprehensive list of scriptures about the motivation Jesus gave his followers go to:

www.livewickmedia.com/firstthings.html

Matthew 5.11-12	"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven , for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
Matthew 5.13	"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness , how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.
Matthew 7.13-14	"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life , and only a few find it .
Matthew 11.28-30	28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me , for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Some final thoughts...

“But, what about...” – Some people will read “First Things” and wonder why this issue or that doctrine was ‘left out’. Please remember that “First Things” is not intended to be a complete statement of everything that matters, but only of the things that matter most in the New Testament. That being said, if you sincerely believe there is something in the New Testament that is more important than the four subjects covered here, please contact us via the website. The goal is the truth, always. More @: livewickmedia.com/shorter_writings/how_to_waste_your_life

A Crippling Misunderstanding – Some people think confusion shows humility and certainty shows arrogance. If you get rid of objective reality you are left with subjective experience only. In other words, if you eliminate the notion of “the truth” all you have left is “my truth” and “your truth”. You just can’t read the New Testament – honestly – and find those ideas endorsed by Jesus or anyone else. More @: livewickmedia.com/shorter_writings/crippling_misunderstanding

BTBL – We must – in principle – be committed to the “**B**ig, **T**hick **B**lack **L**ine” between truth and opinion. Yes, we will always have discussions about what goes on either side. However, to do away with the BTBL in principle would mean either a) endless disagreement because everything is true or false, or b) no great mission and meaning in life because everything is just opinion.

All Figured Out – Nobody in their right mind would claim to have God all figured out. However, it seems clear that the body of truth (set of ideas) that was “the gospel” fueled and directed Jesus and his early followers. We can know what the content (message) of the gospel was, and is. We can have that same fuel and direction in our lives today. We can live the vibrant reality that you see on the pages of the New Testament right here, right now!

However, if we do not clearly understand the gospel we will wander around and have the same priorities as the world system around us: survival, comfort and entertainment. If we do not clearly understand the gospel, we will lack the clear objectives and strong motivation needed to persevere when following Jesus gets inconvenient, difficult or dangerous. If we do not clearly understand the gospel, we will present Jesus as one option among many to people we think are ultimately going to be fine, with or without Jesus. You just can’t read the New Testament – honestly – and find these ideas endorsed by Jesus or anyone else. More @: livewickmedia.com/shorter_writings/clear_about_what_matters

Jesus said to

“Go and make disciples”

We must always grow those among us and go look for the spiritually hungry and interested who want to seek and find what it means to simply follow Jesus.

We are ever reaching and expanding, for them...

repent

believe

follow

“First Things” is intended to be clear statement of truth and a catalyst for reflection, exploration and change that matters in people’s lives. We seek truth above all – above popularity, riches, comfort or anything else. We aren’t trying to pick a fight, but rather to find and share truth in a sea of opinion.

You are welcome to contact the author at Livewick@cox.net or via LivewickMedia.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.