

Learning From Jesus

Week 8

‘Little Gospels’ of the Right and the Left

Key Verse:

*And this is the real and eternal life:
That they know you,
The one and only true God,
And Jesus Christ, whom you sent.*

Jesus in John 17:3 (The Message)

Key Terms:

- **Sin Management:** like ‘crisis management’, a phrase Dallas uses to describe strategies or theologies to deal with limited manifestations of sin while leaving vast tracks of life unredeemed.
- **Eternal Life:** not a phrase referring to heaven, but to the ‘eternal kind of life’ flowing from life in the kingdom, available now and in increasing measure to all who simply trust in Jesus ‘in every dimension of our real life’. “The eternal life of which Jesus speaks is not [just] knowledge about God but an intimately interactive relationship with him.” (DC p.47, 49, 50)

Reflections on “Little Gospels”

The Gospel burst on the scene 2000 years ago with stunning Good News brought by Jesus of Nazareth. God’s Kingdom is near at hand! Forgiveness is given by God for all things, to all people who simply trust in Jesus. New Life, an eternal kind of life, is now possible! Here and now, catching up all we are, all we do in this eternal kind of life. Here and now – and there and then!

The results of this Gospel ‘swept the table’ of the ancient world, penetrating every strata of the ancient Roman empire in just three centuries. Ancient testimony to the effects of this gospel over all of life, from personal Christlikeness to interpersonal relationships to community fabric to cultural vitality are abundant and inspiring. As mentioned last week, they are startling in comparison to much Christian life today. 94% of Americans say they believe in God and 74% claim to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ, yet we are virtually statistically identical to our non-believing neighbors in many matters of personal integrity, sexual purity, marital faithfulness and simple honesty.

"Why has the salt lost its savor?" One reason (SG, p.21) is "the kind of Gospel that has been preached and taught within the church of Jesus Christ. The 'poor result [in behavior] is not in spite of what we teach and how we teach, but precisely because of it.' (DC p. 40)

On the theological right, the gospel has too often been reduced to confidence in a particular theory of Christ's atonement, which, when assented to, brings forgiveness from guilt and the promise of eternity. This is the 'management' of the persistent human problems of sin-guilt and mortality

On the theological left, the gospel has been reduced to issues of justice, oppression, liberation from structural evil, and human equality. This is the 'management' of the persistent human problems of structural sin.

Both these approaches leave large tracks of life, including the complexities of the human soul and the unavoidable realities of day-to-day living largely untouched. Sometimes we approach these with optional add-ons, through occasional offerings on 'personal discipleship' or 'transforming the workplace'. That efforts like this are occasional and optional and needed illustrates the point. What Dallas calls 'the gospel of the right' and 'the gospel of the left' are not fully adequate to the life that we must live.

Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom, however, announces the good news that through simple trust in Jesus, the remarkable resources of his kingdom sweep up all we are and all we do into an 'eternal kind of life' here and now. Every dimension of our real life is transformed into Kingdom life in increasing measure as we learn from him how to live all of life. He can be trusted in every part of our lives

Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.

Bible Study: An Interactive Relationship With Jesus (SG p.22)

Look up John 15.1-17

Jesus here teaches on the vine and the branches and the invitation to abide in him. How does this picture of our relationship with him speak to what I have called 'the little gospels' of the right and the left?

Look at verse 15. When Jesus calls us his friends and says that he has held nothing back from us (vs 16), how does this speak to the opportunity to live all your life in a dynamic kingdom partnership with Jesus?

"Which of the following ideas fascinate you? Which scare you?"

- That I can be involved in God's business...
- That I can be called God's friend...
- That Jesus will teach me what he has learned from the Father..."

Readings for Jan 28th

Skim The Divine Conspiracy, Chapter Three, picking out main themes

Read Study Guide pp 29-39

1. Which of the ideas about God from the Divine Conspiracy surprises you a little? (DC p.61-66)

- God leads an interesting life
- God is full of joy
- God is a great single eternal experience of all that is good and true and beautiful and right
- God cherishes the earth and each human being on it

2. Which, if any, of the images of God below have you entertained? (DC p.61-66) God as a

- Morose and miserable monarch
- Frustrated and petty parent
- Policemen on the prowl

3. What are some reasons why it is difficult to believe that the world 'is a perfectly safe place for us to be?' (DC p.66)

4. Why is it important to have a clear eyed vision that a totally good and competent God is right here with us to look after us"? (DC p.67)

5. Jesus used the phrase (in Matthew), 'the kingdom of the heavens', and Dallas writes (DC pp 71-73) that this phrase describes God's rule and "the nearness of God". Explain this.
