

A Gospel Shaped Life

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn back to Philippians chapter 1 and I want us to look again at verse 27 where Paul writes, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind, siding side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And I want us to focus especially on his words at the start where he says, Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Philippians 1.27, Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ. That way statement there on the screen is one that we can break into three parts.

First of all it talks about the gospel of Christ here. Now that's the message that lies at the heart of Christianity. This is the core teaching of the Bible.

In other words, this is talking about what Christians believe. When we talk about the gospel, that is the message that we believe. A body of information, a collection of facts, a system of truth, an announcement that needs to be shared.

[1 : 19] That's what we believe. So you've got that bit there, the gospel. Then at the start you've got this reference to our manner of life. In other words, it's referring to our patterns of behavior.

It's talking about what Christians do. Now literally that word, it's one word that's translated manner of life. It's a word that actually means to be a citizen. We'll talk a little bit more about that later on. But it's conveying this idea, how you conduct yourself as a citizen. And crucial to that is how you relate to others. Being in a society, being in a city always involves interaction with others.

So that phrase there is getting us to think about how we live, our speech, our conduct, our actions, our reactions. It's all talking about our manner of life.

So over here you've got what Christians believe. Over here you've got what Christians do. And then the third thing that's been emphasized is that these two things have to be connected.

[2 : 22] It has to be a connection between what we believe and what we do. And Paul describes that connection in terms of worthiness. What we do must be worthy of what we believe.

Now that word worthy is conveying the idea of being suitable, proper, appropriate. In other words, that what we believe is matched appropriately by how we live.

And all of that is coming together to give us one of the most important lessons that we can ever learn. One that I know that you know, but one that we have to keep coming back to. Our manner of life must be worthy of the Gospel that we believe.

In other words, the Gospel needs to shape every part of our lives. Or as our title for today says, we need to have a Gospel shaped life.

And that means that if you are a Christian today, or if you become a Christian today, whether you are many years down the road as a Christian, or whether you are just taking your first steps, or whether you're not quite sure where you stand.

[3 : 31] For all of us, this is teaching us a crucial truth that our lives need to be shaped in such a way so that there's our real and proper correspondence between what we believe and how we live from day to day.

Or sometimes it's helpful just to think in terms of the opposite. It must never be the case that as Christians we say that we believe one thing and then we go and live out our lives in a way that completely contradicts that.

That is something that we must always strive to avoid. And that's a huge challenge, and I more than anybody else here have made many, many mistakes and have many failures in that regard.

But what I want us to see today is that even though it's challenging, this is also actually something, what this verse is calling for, is something that will make such a beautiful and positive and helpful

difference to our lives.

And all is asking us to do something so good and so wise in these words. But how do we do that? How do we do exactly what this is asking for us?

[4 : 44] What's involved? How is it possible? Well, I want to suggest that there's three things that are crucial. In order for this to happen, we need to understand the gospel.

We need to examine our own manner of life, and we need to connect the two. So I want to unpack these together this morning. So first of all, understanding the gospel.

When it comes to understanding the gospel, there's obviously loads that we could say. The Bible is a big book, theology is an amazing subject, and for a million reasons Jesus is just brilliant.

And so there's loads that we could say about understanding the gospel. There's also a lot we could say about misunderstanding the gospel, because if you look at history, or if you look at our own day and age, and probably even if you look at our own community, maybe even our own congregation, there are many, many ways in which the gospel has been misunderstood.

So there's loads that we could talk about, and we're only going to kind of barely scratch the surface for a couple of minutes just now. One of the key things we could focus on, and that we would maybe naturally focus on when we talk about understanding the gospel, is to think about how you actually become a Christian.

[6 : 02] And that's something that we want to keep coming back to. We think, well, you know, how do I become a Christian? What must I do to be saved? And the answer to that is very simple. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.

And that's the crucial point that we're saved by faith. Not by our own works, not by our own remarkable experiences, not by our own knowledge, not by anything else that you add to the gospel, like we're trying to say to the children, we're saved by faith in Jesus.

That's because he's done everything that's needed. He died on the cross for our sins, he rose again, and by trusting in him, we are forgiven.

All our sin placed on him, his righteousness placed on us. That's at the heart of the gospel. And that is incredibly important.

But we have to also recognize that that is only part of the gospel. Yes, it's crucial, but it's actually only part of it.

[7 : 04] Because the truth is, the good news of Jesus is actually much, much bigger. And it's so important that we see and understand that. So how should we understand that?

Well, as I said, loads that we could say, we could talk all day on this. I want to just give you five things that I think are crucial for understanding the whole of the gospel. First is God.

At the heart of the gospel is the fact that God is the ultimate reality. God alone is ultimate reality. He is our Creator. He is the infinite. He is the explanation. He alone is ultimate reality.

And the amazing thing is that He's not forgotten you. The God who is the explanation for the trillions of galaxies that exist in this universe and for the vast ages of time that have brought us to this point and that are stretching into the future.

[8 : 12] The God who is over all of that has not forgotten you. In fact, you are more precious to Him than you will ever understand.

So it starts with God. And God is doing a work of restoration. At the heart of the gospel is the fact that God is doing a work of restoration. In fact, the gospel arises from the reality of sin.

The fact that sin has broken us. Sin has broken our relationships with one another. Sin has broken our relationship with the environment around us. And most of all, sin has broken our relationship with God.

And in that context of brokenness where we have pushed God away, where we've rebelled against Him and said to God, we don't need you. And where we see a world that is so broken as a result, God has come with a message of restoration.

A message of restoration for humanity, whereby we are rescued from the power of sin. Restoration of relationships with one another, where God is bringing us into that beautiful family called the church, where we love one another as brothers and sisters.

[9 : 26] A relationship with the creation being restored so that we can actually go out into this world and thrive and achieve amazing things and see all the beauty that God has made and we can use it and enjoy it and marvel at it.

We also strive to relieve pain and suffering caused by sin. We want to restore our relationship with the world that we live in. But ultimately, our relationship with God is restored through the gospel. We are forgiven of our sins. So we are justified. That means we are declared righteous. Instead of being condemned, God is saying, I've washed your sin away.

We are adopted into His family as His children and we are brought out of the power of sin into the family of God.

It's an amazing work of restoration. It begins now and it will be fully consummated in the new creation in the future. God brings restoration in the gospel.

[10:26] Gospel also gives us answers. And this is such a crucial thing to recognise, the gospel gives us answers. It's a body of information.

That's what it is. And that information contains the answers that we crave. It gives us the truth, in other words. The truth about ultimate reality.

I know I keep coming back to that, but this is one of the most fundamentally important points that every single human being alive today has got to consider. What is ultimate reality? What is the explanation for everything?

What lies at the end of the chain of causation that's brought us to this point? Where did we come from? And every other answer that I've heard to that question is rubbish.

The answer that we come from nothing or that we come from a force that we come from whatever it might be. None of these actually get you to the answer.

[11:32] Because people always go back so far and they say, well, there was this or there was that or the next thing. And they say, well, what was behind that? And they have no answer. Only the gospel gives us an answer that there is an uncreated God from whom everything else comes.

The gospel gives us answers about humanity. That you're not just an accident. You're not just an illusion that relationships are not just about power.

But that actually the deep bonds of love and friendship that we enjoy, that the preciousness that we see in one another is real. And it has a basis.

Gospel gives us answers about ethics. It gives us an eternal reason why racism is wrong. Why justice matters.

Why people must be recognized as equal. And why all sorts of heinous crimes that we see in the world are actually ontologically wrong.

[12:32] The gospel explains that. And the gospel gives us answers about our experience. It tells us that suffering is wrong, that loneliness is hard, that injustice does matter, that we do have a purpose, that death is an enemy, the gospel gives us answers.

Gospel also is all about change. The gospel changes things. And it changes things all for the better. And this is so incredibly important. And the gospel is about changing things. It's about changing a broken world. It's about changing a hopeless situation in the face of death.

It's about changing the direction of our lives. And that's why the gospel is all about repentance, where we turn from our sin and to God. We change direction.

It's all about faith, where we stop trusting in ourselves and turn to Jesus and trust in Him. The gospel is about bringing change in the way that we are as individuals, as we are sanctified and as the Holy Spirit restores us more and more to what we are made to be, as we put to death the sin in our lives and as the fruit of the spirit is cultivated in our lives.

[13:50] The gospel changes things as the church advances in the world, not just in terms of making more churches, but in terms of the great moral emphasis of Christianity, whereby you help people who are in need, where you share the resources that you have, where you strive to relieve suffering.

All of that is what has transformed the world for the better in the last 2,000 years. The gospel changes our lives and it also changes eternity.

It means that death, the enemy that we're all terrified of, actually becomes the doorway to paradise, to heaven, to eternal life with Jesus and with one another.

The gospel is all about change. And last of all, the fifth thing I want to say is the gospel is about enjoyment. It's amazing. You go back 400 years and you find a group of theologians gathering in London at Westminster to write the catechisms, which is a long list of questions and answers to explain the Christian faith.

And you think, oh man, that sounds so dry and so dull and so heavy. And then you look at the first question that they write. What is the chief end of man? In other words, what's our purpose?

[15:12] And the answer is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And they were so right because of the heart of the gospel is enjoyment.

The gospel reveals that God's plans for us are good. They're actually blooming amazing. The gospel is a message of joy.

The church is a community of love. Our world is full of things that God has made for us to delight in. Landscape and art and beauty and color, flowers, achievements, everything.

All of that comes from God. It's made for us to delight in. Our attitude should be one where we're full of smiles. Yes, I know that for all of us there are sorrows and tears and suffering, but still at the same time the gospel gives us reason to smile because at the heart of it all is the fact that we are to enjoy God, to enjoy his creation, to enjoy the people that he has made.

These are the things that lie at the heart of the gospel and it all stands on one key thing. And it's hidden on the screen.

[16:30] It all stands on grace. The fact that God gives us what we don't deserve. The fact that God wants to be generous towards us.

The fact that God wants to lavish upon us his blessings and his goodness. That is what lies at the heart of the gospel. And it's crucial for us to recognize that if you don't see the gospel in those terms, then you don't understand it.

If you don't see the gospel in those terms, then you don't understand it and you need to get back to think, right, I need to re-understand this because I'm not clear. And this is so crucial because so often people misunderstand the gospel.

People think that the gospel restricts life. People think that it undermines freedom. You're not going to be able to do the things that you enjoy. People think that the gospel is boring, that you have to sacrifice all fun and pleasure and happiness if you're going to follow Jesus.

People think that the gospel is brainless, that if you're going to believe all that stuff, you have to abandon science and truth and philosophy and rationality, even though God actually made all of those things as well.

[17:49] People think that if you follow Jesus, you're going to become isolated, that you're going to be cut off. People think that if you follow Jesus, you're going to have to stop doing what you enjoy, that you just need to be serious and even better be miserable every day.

And people think that if you're going to follow Jesus, you have to have your life sorted. You have to have yourself sorted. You have to put yourself right. You have to stop doing the things that you know are wrong. You have to understand things. You have to be in a better place that you have to have your life sorted.

People look at that and people look at the gospel and they think that's it. And some of you here who are maybe not Christians or who are not sure where you stand before the Lord, some of you think like that.

And some of you who are Christians live like that. But do you know what all of that is?

It's rubbish. And it's rubbish for two reasons. It's rubbish because it's not the gospel. And it's rubbish because it's actually rubbish.

[19:04] That's a rubbish life to live. That's a rubbish belief to have. That's a rubbish worldview. And it's not the gospel. And that's the amazing thing that the gospel is just so much better.

The gospel is about God restoring us and the universe. It's about God giving us the answers that we desperately need. It's about God changing us and the world around us for the better.

And it's about God giving us so, so much to enjoy. And at the pinnacle of enjoyment is knowing Him, knowing the abundance of His love and goodness, His wisdom, His holiness, His glory.

And He's giving it all as a gift because of how much He loves us. We've got to make sure we understand the gospel. And this is where I want to say, please, if you have questions about the gospel, please ask, please always ask.

If you're looking at that list thinking, I don't understand how that fits together, or I'm not sure, please ask, we always want to share questions. And this is where I want to just give a wee plug for Thursday evenings.

[20:18] I want to give a plug for Thursday evenings. We meet in the wee room at the back. We spend time praying together, and then we look at a passage of the Bible together. We're sitting in a

circle. We're talking. It's very, very relaxed.

It's not an intimidating environment at all. In fact, I want to tell you about a new attendee at the prayer meeting that we had on Thursday night. We had a new person come to the prayer meeting on Thursday night. I came down my car for a wee of Tom's past a driving test, so I'm down to one car.

You don't need the car to pick up. John, Tom was away with the car. So I had to cycle down. I cycled down to church for the prayer meeting. I sat down in there. We're all just getting ready. It was about 27 minutes past seven.

Started at half past. Who walked in? My dog. Rosie, the dog, came straight in in the church door, into the room, came to the prayer meeting.

Now, the reason she came was because she'd seen me leave on my bike. Sometimes I take Rosie, sometimes I go out on my bike and I take Rosie and she'll run alongside me. So she thought, oh, bike, that means we're going for a walk.

[21 : 24] And she's like, you forgot me. And so five minutes after I've arrived, Rosie turns up at the prayer meeting. It was very, very funny. If my blooming dog can come to the prayer meeting, so can you.

It would just be great to see you there. It would be so good. We need to understand the gospel. We also need to examine. I'm going to be very quick with the second two points. They're much shorter than the first one.

We need to examine our own manner of life as well. And that's the second key thing that this requires. And as I said before, this phrase, manner of life, is actually a word that refers to being a citizen.

The Greek word for city is the word polis, which you may be new or you can see how it connects with things. And the word here is polituomai, which is building on that same root.

And so it's conveying this idea of being in a city, conveying an idea of being part of a polis, conveying the idea of how we relate to others. You can't be in a city without being connected to people.

[22 : 27] And so I was thinking about how do we understand this? Well, I think a good way to think about it is to ask, what are your personal policies? So every society has got policies in terms of how it functions, so do workplaces and everything.

What about you as an individual? We're thinking about our manner of life. What are your personal policies? Let me ask you a few questions as examples. What is your policy when another driver does something stupid?

For some of us, that policy is instant rage. It's just like nuclear. What's your policy? What's your policy when you're made to wait for something?

Whether it's a ferry or whether in a shop or whatever. What's your policy when you're tired and when your fuse is shorter than usual? Everybody's fuse gets shorter when they're tired. What's your policy when that happens?

What's your policy when you feel like you've failed? Like you try to do something and you've got intentions for it to go really well and then it just doesn't go well. It doesn't go right and you feel like you've failed.

[23 : 35] What's your policy when you feel scared? What's your policy when you're tempted by a particular sin? What's your policy when someone hurts you?

And there's so many more examples that we could give. But these are the crucial things to think about because these are all the situations where our manner of life can go very quickly out of step with the gospel that we believe.

Where, for example, we come on Sunday and we just rest so thankful for the forgiveness that we have in Jesus.

And then we go home to our families or we go to work or we're in our communities and someone hurts us somewhere like, I'm never forgiving them. And we hold that grudge on a permanent basis. That does not fit together. And there are so many other examples where we can do the same thing and we've got to think this through. We have to think about it as individuals. We have to think about the patterns of thought that rumble through our minds.

[24 : 48] When we feel threatened, when we feel excited, when we feel determined, when we feel useless. What stuff goes through our minds? Maybe you go to work tomorrow morning. You see a

massive list of emails.

You've got people who are difficult and complicated and you think, oh, I just cannot do this. And we can despair. And yet the gospel has said, Jesus said, I'm with you at every single moment of your life.

And you go, well, that can make a difference. And so it applies personally in all sorts of different situations. It applies in terms of our relationships with others, whether that's family, colleagues, friends, whether it's the person that we've fallen in love with, whether it's the person that we've fallen out with, whether it's the person that we find very, very hard to like.

In those situations, does the gospel shape the way we behave? Does it shape the way we behave? And it cannot happen in positive ways. It can happen in negative ways. I've spoken a bit about, you know, if someone hurts you, you don't forgive them.

The other thing that can happen is that you can find someone that you like. You might find someone you fall in love with and then you make them the idol that your whole life fits around. And it's like nothing matters more than pleasing this person.

[25 : 59] That can be the person you're in love with. It could also be your children or it could be a friend or whatever. You think nothing matters more than what they think of me. That's not the gospel.

The gospel says nothing matters more than what God thinks of you. And He loves you forever. So it applies to our individuals, it applies to our relationships, it applies to our circumstances.

How do we respond when things go well? Are we humble and thankful? Or do we really take a huge amount of pride bordering on arrogance when things go well?

How do we respond when things go badly? Are we frustrated? Are we angry? Are we afraid? Are we gutted? Do we capitulate in all these ways? The gospel has got something to say. The gospel has got something to say.

And so we need to examine our own lives. We take what we believe, we think about how we live our lives, and the third thing we've got to do is make sure that we connect the two.

[27 : 11] The two have got to be connected. And this is the key point that Paul is making. Your manner of life, the way you live as a citizen, what you do day to day, and the gospel have got to be connected in a proper and appropriate way.

And what I wanted to see is that it makes such a brilliant and beautiful difference to our lives when we do that. And you can see that in this chapter when you look at Paul's life.

Let me go through it very quickly. In verses 1 to 6, Paul is writing to these Philippians and he is rejoicing in the progress that they are making.

Now, that's not always easy. He's looking at other people and they are doing well. Sometimes that's not easy.

Often that's not easy because we think, oh, why are they doing better than us? What are they doing that I'm not doing? But Paul's not resentful, he's not miserable, he's not confrontational.

[28 : 17] He's just delighted that his friends are doing well. In other words, he's just positive. And that's because of the gospel. And it becomes even more interesting when you look in verses 7 to 13.

I won't read through them, but it's telling us that he's in prison as he writes these letters. So Paul is in prison, which would not have been part of his plans.

And his desire was to go and travel further with the gospel. It didn't happen because he was locked up. And yet here we see that Paul recognizes that there is purpose in the midst of rubbish circumstances.

And that's not easy to recognize either. Paul is there in jail. And yet he recognizes that God has his purposes.

That what has happened to me has actually really served to advance the gospel. Versus 14 to 15, Paul, 14 to 20, Paul has this fascinating bit where he talks about how the fact that he's in prison, he can't preach.

[29 : 27] So other people are preaching. And some people are preaching because they support Paul, they're his friends, they like him, and they want to just help him. And some other people are preaching because they actually don't like Paul. And they're like, actually, we want to do better.

And so it's a bit like having two different denominations. You've got Paul, the one who lined themselves with Paul, and they're like, yeah, we want to do well, we want to preach. And the others

are like, well, actually, we don't really like them, but we want to see our church thrive and we want to progress.

And you've got this rivalry between those who are trying to preach the gospel. And it's all a bit childish and it all seems a bit unnecessary. And Paul looks at it and he says, I actually don't care. I actually don't care because all I want is that Jesus will be proclaimed. He said, I do not mind whether it's in pretense or in truth, I just want Christ to be proclaimed.

And that's because the gospel is shaping his manner of behavior. He's like, I do not matter. I am not important. Paul's reputation is minor.

[30 : 33] The key thing is that Jesus is proclaimed. And then lastly, again, I won't read through it all because you've got this long section, but it's summed up by his words at the start there.

Paul's in prison. He knows he's in danger. He knows his life may be at risk. And yet in the midst of that challenge, he has amazing confidence that for me to live as Christ and to die is game.

Actually, I am in this awful situation in prison. I've got opponents who don't like me. There's all sorts going on. But you know, my choice is this.

I either carry on serving Jesus, whatever he takes me or Jesus takes me home to be in paradise with him forever. And he recognizes that's choosing between two wonderful things.

It's a choice between roast beef and roast chicken. They're both brilliant. And that's because the gospel shapes the way he thinks, the way he behaves.

[31 : 42] And I want to ask, do you not want to live like that as well? Do you not want to live like that as well? Because many people don't live like that.

There's many people who don't follow Jesus, so they don't have this truth and security and hope in their lives. But there's even people who do follow Jesus, but they don't live like this because they don't make this connection.

So yes, they do believe, but it does not connect with the way they live their lives. And instead, we have many people who believe the gospel that we live as though it's not true.

We believe the gospel, and yet we live as though it's not true. It can happen in massive ways. It can happen in tiny ways. We believe Jesus' words when he says, I am with you and I'll never leave you. And yet the moment we face struggle, we think I'm so alone. And it can happen in many, many other ways as well. What we need to do is keep pressing the truths of God's word into our hearts.

[32 : 57] Again and again and again. The fact that there's so many things I could say, time is running out. But just the fact that we have good news from Jesus. We want to proclaim that good news.

We have been shown patience by Jesus, so we want to show patience to others. We've received compassion. We therefore show compassion. We have so much reason for joy. We want to show that.

And we have been loved. And so we want to love one another and love the people in our community in every way that we can. We want it to be the case that the amazing truth of the gospel shapes every part of our lives.

As we conclude, there's two crucial things to say. First of all, this is the difference that the gospel can make in your life.

This is the difference it can make. The fact that the reality of God's grace, His mercy and love can shape and transform every aspect of our lives for the better.

[34 : 03] This is the difference that following Jesus can make in your life. And you see that in people's lives. You really do. People who have a peace and a joy and a hope, but nothing else can give them.

That's the difference that the gospel can make in your life. But the second crucial thing is this. This is the difference that you can make in other people's lives this week.

Because a gospel shaped life is a wonderful person to live with. A gospel shaped mom or dad is a wonderful parent to have.

A gospel shaped colleague is a brilliant person to work alongside. A gospel shaped friend is the best kind of friend.

You can be that. You already are that. But let's continue to be it more and more and more. The gospel is so good. It is so exciting. It's so amazing.

[35 : 08] Why or why or why would we want our lives to be shaped by anything else?