

# Tuesday Lunchtime Bible Studies

## *What St. Paul Really Said, by N. T. Wright*

### Chapter 3

- ❖ The new Paul?
  - “conversion” and “vocation” – one and the same for Paul
  - He remained fiercely loyal to the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob
    - Paul would never have seen himself as “converting” from Judaism to Christianity
    - Paul did not invent a new religion
    - He was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and died as one. He simply believed that the long awaited climax of the Jewish story had arrived, in the person of Jesus
  - His vocation was to tell this story, to proclaim to all who would listen that Jesus was Lord of the whole world. He was to be the herald of the king.
- ❖ Misunderstanding “Gospel” in the modern church
  - What does “Gospel” mean? To what does it refer?
    - The four gospels?
    - A message? But what sort?
      - Good news? What’s the news?
    - An *ordo salutis* – an order of salvation?
      - Something like the so-called “Roman Road”
      - How we get saved – admit sin, believe in Jesus and invite him into your heart
    - This is all good, but just not what Paul means by “gospel.”
- ❖ Backgrounds to Paul’s usage
  - “Gospel” translates the Greek *evangelion*
    - The Hebrew background
      - See Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7
      - These passages and others are about God’s triumph and the return from exile
    - The Greco-Roman background
      - The *evangelion* was a regular technical term referring to the announcement of a great victory, or to the birth or accession of an emperor.
      - See the 9BC inscription on p. 43
    - These two views are really one, for God’s purposes have always been about the rescuing of the whole world, all peoples. There is only God and this is his creation and his rescue project – not Pharaoh nor Caesar.
- ❖ The Fourfold Gospel Concerning Jesus
  - See Romans 1:1-5
    - For Paul, the Gospel is the true story about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection through which the living God becomes king of the world. It is an authoritative summons to obedience, what Paul calls the “obedience of faith.”
  - Four steps
    - Jesus was crucified
    - Jesus was resurrected
    - Jesus was thereby proved to be Messiah (King)
    - He was thereby installed as Lord of the world
  - The crucified Jesus
    - The cross is at the center of Paul’s theology. All topics point to or from the cross.

- Whereas the Romans used the horror of crucifixion as an instrument of fear and intimidation, God used it as the place of joy and freedom.
  - The cross is God’s victory over the “principalities and powers.” It is the Great Reversal!
- The cross turns the ways of this world upside down
  - For the Romans it meant defeat, death, and humiliation; for God it means victory, life, and glory.
- This is thoroughly anchored in Judaism, beginning with the promises made to Abraham. This is where all things have been pointing, including the prophets. This is the climax of the covenant, the keeping of God’s great promises.
- The risen Jesus
  - The resurrection is the proof on which all else hinges. That is why Paul gets so evidentiary in 1 Cor. 15.
    - Because death is a consequence of sin (see Genesis 3), Jesus’ victory over sin (his faithfulness and fidelity to God and neighbor) meant that death could not hold him.
  - Without the resurrection, Jesus dies another failed would-be messiah. A great man and teacher, but still just another in a long line of many great men and women.
  - As a Jew and Pharisee, for Paul, “resurrection” meant “bodily resurrection.”
  - Jesus’ resurrection meant that the return from exile had happened and that Paul was living in the Last Days, just as we are.
    - We can think of this as a “two-stage” arrival: Jesus’ resurrection which *has* happened and our own, which *will* happen.
- King Jesus
  - “Christ” is a title, not a name. It means the “anointed one” and Jesus’ day was used mainly to refer to the one whom God would use to inaugurate the arrival of God’s kingdom.
  - Thus, the gospel is message whose subject is the King.
  - The people of God, those who have been “baptized into Christ” have been incorporated into the people of the Messiah, the King.
  - Jesus is the king who turned everything upside. And it is this king who, in death, defeated evil at its very heart.
  - Of course, Jesus is king, then, of the entire world. Not Caesar, Jesus! Jesus is Lord. Not Caesar.
- Lord Jesus
  - In the NT world, *kyrios* (Greek for “lord”) was used typically to refer to the emperor.
  - In calling Jesus, *kyrios*, Paul is providing an astounding claim about who Jesus really was and is.
    - See Philippians 2:5-11
    - Again, the Lord is Jesus . . . not Caesar.
    - No one can serve two masters! Whom will we choose? Jesus, the true Lord, or Caesar, the pretender?
- In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul is providing answers to people’s questions.
  - See Acts 17:16-34
  - See Galatians 4:1-11. How can you give up the true gospel for a pseudo-gospel?
- Romans 1:16 - The gospel is the power of God for salvation. It cannot have “no effect!”