Mark 6: Proclaim Jesus

Before You Gather:

- Lesson Objective(s):
    - Understand the meaning of the word gospel and its profound implications for all of life and creation.
    - Discover effective ways to build relationships and grow your love for other people so that sharing the gospel becomes natural and impactful.
    - Get practice sharing your story and/or the gospel story with others.

- Read: *Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 1:8; John 20:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:1-4; Romans 10:14-15*

- Prepare:
    - Select a few of the passages above to read with your group either before or after the video lesson.
    - Time permitting, we recommend a couple *optional* resources to help you better prepare for this lesson.
        - Gospel Word Study by Bible Project (5 minutes)
        - What Does The Word "Gospel" Mean? – An Interview with NT Wright (1 hour)
    - Review and be familiar with this week's practice. In this session, our practice is actually a network of practices that, together, create the conditions for us to proclaim Jesus effectively. You probably won't have time to cover everything in great detail, but we do recommend you leave enough time for people to practice sharing their story (see tips below) in the comfort and trust of the group.

- Content Summary:
  Most Christians know, almost intuitively, that sharing their faith is an important part of following Jesus. But the point remains that many who practice the way of Jesus find the skills associated with declaring the gospel to be an area of profound weakness in their apprenticeship. The fact of the matter is that we struggle here, not so much in knowing why this competency matters or what we should be doing. We struggle with what to share and how to share it effectively. And so, as we turn our attention to Mark #6–Proclaiming Jesus–two questions are of the utmost importance: What should we be proclaiming? And how do we proclaim it effectively? We will consider the first question here and the second question in the practice section below.

  The word 'gospel' is one of those terms that we hear and use so frequently that we often take for granted that we know what it actually means. Gospel simply means good news. "News means," as NT Wright puts it, "that something has happened as a result of which the world is a different place." Christians believe that something happened in

history that changed the course of history, and that it is good news for the whole world. One helpful framework for understanding the story of the gospel is the analogy of flying a plane over a city vs. walking the streets of a city. From the air, you'll see the *big* picture–the grandeur and scale of everything all at once. But this spectacular, wide-ranging view comes at the expense of seeing the nuance and complexity that you would see if you walked on foot, and vice versa. You need *both* vantage points to get a full picture of the city. And so it is with the gospel. Each vantage point has been helpfully captured in four movements:

Gospel in the Air: Creation —> Fall —> Redemption —> Consummation

- *Creation*: Heaven/Earth united, humans are image bearing partners with God
- *Fall*: Heaven/Earth fractured, image bearers plunged into death/exile by sin/idolatry
- *Redemption*: Abraham chosen-->Abraham's family as God's means of blessing the whole world and reversing the curse-->Israel is the nation born from Abraham's family, they become God's covenant people; they repeatedly fail to stay faithful to God and to their vocation-->Jesus is born and becomes the representative of His people. As the faithful Israelite, He fulfills the covenant, deals with sin, and makes a way for the whole world to be blessed.
- *Consummation*: The accomplished work of Jesus allows the Spirit to infuse life into the Church, God's agents of blessing and healing, as we await God's ultimate future where Heaven/Earth reunited, image bearers made new, and vocation is restored.

Gospel on the Ground: God —> Man —> Christ —> Response

- *God*: Creator/sustainer of all things, fundamentally relational (trinity), etc.
- *Man*: Created for relationship/partnership with God, corrupted by sin
- *Christ*: Jesus is God become human. He stands in our place and bears the consequences of our sin, opening the way to restored relationship/partnership.
- *Response*: This story demands we do something with it–accept it, by which we mean give your life over to it, or reject it, which is to do nothing at all.

As part of this lesson, your group will watch a video lesson from Dr. Tim Mackie of the Bible Project. His teaching does a fantastic job of unpacking the gospel from both vantage points, though he doesn't use the language of 'air' and 'ground' that we've introduced here. In the message, Dr. Mackie rightly observes that those who are compelled by something not only desire to talk about it, but also to explain/challenge misconceptions that cause people to miss the thing we are so excited about. Misconceptions are usually the result of overemphasizing part of the story ('in the air' or 'on the ground') at the expense of another. For example, one of the most popular (mis)understandings of the gospel in our cultural moment is that the gospel is the correct beliefs about Jesus that will allow me to go to heaven (instead of hell) when I die. This presentation gets some things right, but it also gets a ton wrong. Most notably, the gospel story is precisely not about how we go to heaven when we die, but rather how the love, life, and presence of God comes on earth *as in heaven*. It's a story of the redemption and restoration of all of creation (Rom. 8), not escape and

destruction. This view also tends to de-emphasize the importance of gospel efforts that aren't explicitly evangelistic, and it can leave converts with the impression that discipleship (i.e. practicing the way) is an optional add-on. Conversely, some people prefer the story 'in the air' and completely neglect the story 'on the ground,' which has often resulted in what we might call the "social gospel." This formulation often sees the primary role of the church as activists for truth, justice, and equality, and as advocates for 'the least of these.' The top priority in this framework is to make the world a better place (which is great!), but this often comes at the neglect of calling people to personal repentance or allegiance to Jesus.

The primary challenge for followers of Jesus in this cultural moment is to share the story–the whole story–in a compelling way. In his book, *How to Reach The West Again,* Tim Keller identifies four tasks that the church will need to take seriously if we are to proclaim Jesus effectively: Attention, Attraction, Demonstration, and Conviction. (1) Attention: A person's attention is what we earn when we model a different way of being human up close and personally. This means we must build relationships with people who are far from Jesus. (2) Attraction: When you get people's attention, you can show them just how attractive the gospel really is. This is often the result of answering questions, correcting misconceptions, and offering clear explanations for the key claims of the way of Jesus. For example, it is the claim of the Christian message that Jesus brings (among other things) a secure sense of identity, freedom from the past, forgiveness and healing, a basis for justice, meaning in suffering, hope for life after death, and purpose in all of life. These are all things that human beings innately desire, which means the gospel message is inherently attractive when presented correctly. Do we know how to explain our message in a way that is attractive to people who are far from Jesus? (3) Demonstration: This refers to the notion that the gospel message loses its force when our words and actions are inconsistent. Do we really believe our own claims? Has it really made a difference in our lives? As the old saying goes, "I can't hear what you're saying, your actions are too loud." (4) Conviction: Keller's last point is that we will need conviction, or boldness, in our declaration and demonstration of the gospel if we want to see lives changed and communities transformed. We will also need to resist the urge to water down or change the gospel message in order to make it more palatable to the cultural pressures of the moment.

Now, one last point is worth mentioning here and it may be the most important. In this lesson you will be exposed to a variety of formulations and explanations of the gospel. It may feel overwhelming. The beauty of the gospel, though, is that it is deep and complex enough to demand a lifetime to fully understand and appreciate, but at its heart the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand and be changed by it. Just as one can enjoy a good meal without knowing the science behind taste or the skills of a chef, so one need not know *everything* or have every detail of the biblical story worked out before they can share a simple, clear, and potentially life altering gospel

presentation with someone far from Jesus. If you can convey to another person the love of God made known through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and how it not only impacts their life, but catches them up in the drama of God's ultimate plans for all of creation, then you can share the gospel.

When You Gather

- Begin in Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Teaching:
    - Watch: Proclaiming Jesus by Tim Mackie (37 Minutes)
    - Questions for Discussion (10 Minutes)
        1. What grabbed your attention/heart/mind from the video?
        2. Tim Mackie says in the video for this lesson that when we are compelled by something, we naturally love to talk about it *and* to clarify or recontextualize misunderstandings others may have. What person, place, thing, or idea are compelled by in this way? (NOTE: Reference Tim's example of his favorite tacos in Portland, and encourage your group not to give "churchy" answers here. This is just a fun question.)
        3. If you grew up in the church, in one or two sentences, what would you say was the gospel you were taught? If you did not grow up in the church, in one or two sentences, what would you say you thought the gospel was? [Bonus Question: If your understanding of the gospel has changed, in one or two sentences, how would you define the gospel now?]
        4. It's common in Christian circles to use words and phrases like "evangelism" or "sharing the gospel" when we talk about proclaiming Jesus. What comes to your heart/mind when you hear words/phrases like that? Is the skill of proclaiming Jesus an area of strength or weakness for you personally? (NOTE: Another way to ask this question may be to see how comfortable your group would be if they knew they had to share the gospel with someone *right now*.)
        5. Who first shared Jesus with you? How did they do it? What difference has it made in your life?

- This Week's Practice: Do For One (30 Minutes)

  Now that the group has spent several minutes considering what the gospel is, it's time to turn our attention to proclaiming the gospel effectively. To do this, we will walk you through a simple tool called B.L.E.S.S. It's a framework for seeing the gospel as a relational project, helping us build the kinds of relationships with people in our spheres of influence that may lead them to become open to hearing the gospel message.

Relational Proclamation – B.L.E.S.S.

B – Be in Prayer

- Action: Identify 1-3 people who are far from Jesus that you can begin to pray for on a regular basis.

L – Listen

- Action: Ask good questions. If you don't know the person you are praying for well, then get to know them. Questions about family, employment, friends, interests/hobbies, pain points, etc. are a great way to build relationships. If you know the person well already, don't be afraid to ask more pointed questions, such as: What do you think of Jesus? Do you have a faith/church background?

E – Eat

- Action: Share a meal with those you wish to reach. As Rosaria Butterfield says, "Hospitality is how we turn strangers into friends and friends into the family of God." Sharing a meal with someone is a relationship catalyst, and one of the simplest ways to demonstrate that they are loved and seen.

S – Serve

- Action: Identify practical ways to serve those you wish to reach. Building relationships with people usually affords us the opportunity to serve them in meaningful ways, further demonstrating the love of Jesus.

S – Share

- Action: Share the gospel. In a relational context, sharing the gospel often works best when we share our personal story. Consider this simple format as a helpful guide.
    - My life before Jesus – attitudes, beliefs, needs, problems, etc.
    - How I met Jesus – Who shared the gospel with you? Why was it compelling? How did you respond to the gospel?
    - My life now that I belong to Jesus – How has your life changed? What difference(s) has it made to you and what do you want for them?

- Close in Prayer (5-10 Minutes)

  "'*So now, Master…grant that we, your servants, may speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing, so that signs and wonders may come about through the name of your holy son Jesus.'*
  When they had prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they boldly spoke the word of God."

  -Acts 4:29-31

  As a group, close your time together by praying for boldness to be faithful witnesses, for opportunities to share, and for favor with the people you are burdened to share the gospel with.