

# The Gospel We Live

by Richard E. Bieber

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*Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the robust nature of the gospel, highlighting its high promises and extreme demands for believers today.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:31, Matthew 16:24, Mark 1:14, Mark 10:29, Luke 9:62, John 15:7, John 16:2, Romans 3:4

**Topics:** "Radical Discipleship", "The Gospel"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the robust gospel of Jesus, emphasizing the high promises and extreme demands it entails. He highlights the need for repentance, belief in the good news, and radical commitment to live out the gospel in its fullness. Bieber challenges believers to embrace the unfiltered, undiluted gospel of Jesus, which transforms ordinary people into passionate followers obsessed with the glory of God, prayer, love, and spreading the life-changing message. He warns against reducing the gospel to mere theological formulas, urging a return to the powerful, hopeful, and challenging message of Jesus.

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## Transcript

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Mark 1: 14-15

People came in droves to see it in action. Blind folks shouted for joy as their eyes beheld the face of this man who gave them their sight. The lame danced, while the multitudes gasped in awe. No one was disappointed by this gospel which Jesus proclaimed. If you had a need, Jesus had the answer. No strings. Take your blessing and know that you have just beheld a sign of the kingdom of God..

But if you want to follow the sign to where it points, if you want to enter the kingdom, you're going to have to repent and believe the good news. And once you do that, your life will never be the same. Because this gospel not only brings blessings, it makes extreme demands. To believe it you have to repent, make a radical break with your past, and then you have to begin living in its atmosphere, walking in its light.

Follow Jesus across the pages of the four gospels, and you cannot miss the fact that his gospel is much more robust than those versions of it which come to us these days with the extreme promises and radical demands filtered out. Jesus shocked people. We put them to sleep.

Jesus insisted that his gospel --- unfiltered, undiluted --- can be believed and lived. He proved it by gathering a handful of ordinary people and transforming them into men and women who were obsessed with the glory of God. Who knew how to worship. Who made prayer the top priority of their lives. Who learned how to love each other the way their Master loved them. Who answered the call to spread this gospel which had made such a difference in their lives. The impact of these servants of the Word is still felt wherever their gospel, in its full and robust form, is received with integrity.

Of course, these remarkable people were quick to acknowledge that the power to live this gospel did not come from within them. They credited God's grace. They spoke of the Spirit working within them as One whom they loved and looked to, just as they had looked to Jesus in the "days of his flesh." Everything the Spirit was revealing to them, everything he was empowering them to do, was coming from the risen Messiah himself. "He will take what is mine and declare it to you." But from their side of the relationship they understood that they were answering a call to radical commitment. They were literally losing their lives in the purpose of God. They were obsessed with glory even as they worked their jobs and played with their children and broke bread with their friends.

They lived the gospel. A robust gospel of high promise and extreme demands.

"If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.....No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." John 15:7-8 --- Luke 9:62

This robust gospel is still alive and well on earth. And it is still producing men and women who are obsessed with the glory of God, even as they live their ordinary lives in ordinary places. Clothed in the garb of common humanity, these bearers of redemptive power bring with them the atmosphere of heaven as they drive trucks, teach school, build bridges, serve meals. They are the light of the world. They are the city set on a hill which cannot be hid. They are the authentic Body of Christ on earth, salt scattered across the earth to give it flavor.

But what happens when the high promises and extreme demands of Christ's gospel are cooked away in a theological formula of "grace" or "election"? When what was once a blazing insight of Luther or Calvin in a wasteland of spiritual terror has become a plateau of complacency in a church which has lost its vision of the holy? Compared with the straightforward words of Jesus reported to us by the synoptic evangelists and the profound but simple discourses preserved to us in the gospel of John, these theologically filtered versions come through as an emaciated gospel. And they produce malnourished Christians.

What did Jesus mean when he began his ministry with these words:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."? Mark 1:15

Repent and believe the good news? What good news? His listeners did not seem puzzled, because Jesus' message was so clear and powerful and hopeful. The kingdom of God is here! Turn around and take hold of it with your hearts! Act on it! The contrast between this and the legalism and theological hair-splitting of the religious establishment was dramatic.

## High Promises

The promises contained in Jesus' gospel never fade with the passing of time. They are as fresh and true and appealing as the day they first left his lips.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matthew 5

In a world rife with suffering and pain, where the meek are trampled on and the mourners are soon forgotten, these words pouring from the heart of the Eternal are an absolute promise to those who are being lost in the shuffle. More dependable than money, these promises will be fulfilled. Presently, things are absurd, unfair, twisted by lies, infected with gross evil. Never mind, the kingdom of God, which is already at work amid the chaos, will bring it all to an end. You mourners will be comforted. You meek will have the earth as your own. Not even your death will stand in the way of the justice of heaven.

Meanwhile, as you receive this gospel and live in its light, nothing that happens to you is random. You are living under an eye which watches over you for good.

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we

drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and

your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." Matthew 6:31-33

"Walk in the light I am giving you," Jesus is saying, "and you are invulnerable until your work is done." It's not just pie in the sky by and bye. It's pie ala mode here on earth in your daily life. Of course, the pie comes with persecution. But Jesus made clear that the life he offers to us in his gospel doesn't wait until after we die or until he returns. It begins now.

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters

or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Mark 10:29-30

Jesus' gospel promises that the same Spirit who guided him to the cross and raised him from the dead will guide our ways, inspire our minds, even energize our bodies as we walk in the light he imparts to us day by day.

Extreme Demands

If any man/woman would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? Matthew 16:24-26

There is an unspoken understanding in much of Christendom that we have a choice. We can be Class A Christians, folks who dive in with both feet and follow Jesus on the fanatical way to the special rewards stored up for them. Or we can be Class B Christians, who live normal lives in our rat-race culture and rely

on Sunday worship to get us through as recipients of Divine Grace.

But Sunday worship was never meant as sustenance for the "Class B Christian Life Style." The word we hear on Sunday is meant to be a call to radical obedience. The breaking of bread always brings with it the high claim of heaven to become, in Jesus, broken bread for the needy world around us. When we break bread on Sunday morning we are joining ourselves to our Lord's broken body and shed blood in such a way that we become part of it. We become broken bread and poured-out wine for each other and for our neighbor in the world beyond the walls of our church.

And baptism means nothing less than death with Christ.

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, we too might walk in newness of life." Romans 3:4

Sunday worship is desecrated if we treat it as anything less than a continuous renewal of the Master's call to radical commitment. To come under grace is to be baptized with fire. To be united with the crucified and risen Messiah is to share his bitter crust of rejection by a world which continues to despise him.

"They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me." John 16:2-3

As an experiment to test the validity of what I'm saying, pick up the gospel of Matthew. Pretend that you never saw it before, and begin reading as if this document had just been discovered in one of those Dead Sea caves. Forget all the theological concepts you have ever learned. Just make a mental note of every promise Jesus gives to those who follow him, no matter how extreme. Do the same with every command Jesus lays on those who wish to be his followers.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you incorporate these awesome promises and these frightening commands into your daily life. Chances are that your Sunday worship will be richer than you've ever known.

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