

The "Full" Gospel

Acts 16:31 ...“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved,...

For an unbeliever who is familiar with John 3:16, this might be a sufficient gospel message. But there is a context in which this message was given. Not every unbeliever is prepared to take this last step in the gospel.

Why am I using the book of Acts when talking about the gospel? It is not advisable to use the book of Acts as the sole source for establishing a doctrine. There are differences, some changes, which happened after 70 A.D. when the Jewish temple was destroyed and subsequent exile of Jews from Jerusalem.

But, the gospel message does not change. It is a constant. The Book of Acts narrates the apostles presenting the gospel to unbelievers. The four gospel books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are used in presenting the gospel today, especially John chapter 3. So, we can take some pointers from Paul and the other apostles in this matter.

Let's look at Acts chapter 16. Paul and Silas are in Philippi in Macedonia.

Acts 16:22 The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods.

Paul had healed a slave girl who had a "spirit of divination." In other words, she was demon possessed. Paul charged the demon in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. But she was making money for her

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owners. And now that would be over. So the local people became angry at Paul.

What will come out later is that magistrates were not allowed to beat Roman citizens. We know from other passages that Paul was a Roman citizen.

Acts 16:23 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely;

Securely. Not just to guard them, but to lock them up securely. The magistrates don't want there to be any chance that they might escape. The issue will become, that if a prisoner were to escape, the jailer might have to pay with his life after some amount of torture.

Acts 16:24 and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The jailer made sure they were securely fastened to the stocks and not able to escape. He had done his job. No chance these trouble-makers were going to escape.

Acts 16:25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

The jailer was likely listening to them on and off. These were important prisoners who must not escape. As long as they are vocal, they are still secure in the prison. But, he was probably intrigued. In spite of the beatings and being locked up securely in a prison, they are praising God. Here you have the witness of the life. Such a witness can have a powerful effect on an unbeliever.

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Acts 16:26 and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.

This was no ordinary earthquake. This was a large one. Earthquakes in Greece are frequent. You can look at website <https://www.seismoi-live.gr/> for current earthquakes in Greece. The whole building was shaken such that the chains fastened to the walls came loose. Darrell Bock says, "Earthquakes in this region are common. Fitzmyer notes that that the timing of this event is key in pointing to God's work. In Hellenism, an earthquake points to a theophany." A theophany is a manifestation of God.

Acts 16:27 When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped.

A jailer that let a prisoner escape was worthy of death. Killing himself might have been an easier end than having the Romans torture him before killing him. And imagine he is thinking that the earthquake may have taken place because of Paul's and Silas' prayers. They were praising God. Now as a result, a divine theophany. So, he is afraid from two directions: Paul's God wants Paul free. If he escapes, then that means the jailer is going to die.

Acts 16:28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!"

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Acts 16:29 And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas,

Acts 16:30 and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Quoting from Darrell Bock’s commentary on Acts:

“The jailer leads them out of the prison and asks what he must do to be saved.”

“In the logic of the narrative, the jailer surely knows why the men are there. Their religious claims must have registered with him when the quake came and they preserved his life by staying. He in effect asks to share in their deliverance, which the earthquake has symbolized.”

“This is more than a request to save his life as that has already taken place.”

“The earthquake has presented him with irrefutable evidence that God is at work with Paul’s group. He wants to know whatever more Paul can offer. Is there a way to escape God’s reaction to the injustice in which the jailer has played a role? In the face of this evidence, the jailer does not want to be found on the opposing side.”

In this case, the Holy Spirit has prepared the jailer’s soul to hear the final key piece of gospel information. He already knows there is a God, Paul’s God. He already knows of His almighty power in causing a mighty earthquake. The jailer has likely heard and understood some of the prayers said and songs sung by Paul and Silas.

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Acts 16:31 They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

This is the essential gospel, assuming the person already knows about God, about a need to be saved and Jesus. As Darrel Bock says,

“This brief confession expresses the core of what saving response is—to trust in Jesus’s salvation authority and work.”

“Clearly, Luke is summarizing here. The jailer would have the meaning of such a confession explained to him (v. 32 says as much). The theme of Jesus’s authority is what was highlighted in a first-century Gentile context in the church’s preaching (Acts 10:42; 17:30-31).”

Acts 16:32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

Follow-up is important once a person has believed in Jesus Christ as savior. That person needs to know what just happened to him or her. There is now a permanent relationship with God the Father based upon the work of Jesus Christ with access to the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the source of guiding information with a need for a local church to help the new believer grow in grace.

Acts 16:33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

There is an interesting visual play on words. As Darrell Bock points out, “The jailer may have washed the prisoner’s wounds, but he himself received a better washing.”

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Acts 16:34 And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

Paul’s group was blessed because they gave the gospel to the jailer. There is always a blessing for giving the gospel, especially when the unbeliever places his faith in Jesus Christ.

L. S. Chafer tells a story of someone who posed a situation to an acquaintance of his concerning the gospel. He said, I am paraphrasing him, “Suppose there is a lady who is terminally ill and has ten minutes to live. She wants to be saved. What do you tell her?” According to Chafer, the man paused in thoughtful contemplation and said, “I’ll have to think about that.” Of course Acts 16:31 “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved...” would work. She already knows about God and salvation, she just wanted to know how she could be saved, just like the jailer in Acts chapter 16.

If you are going to give the gospel to an unbeliever, has this person reached God consciousness? Does this person understand the concept of God? Remember last week we studied Paul’s presentation of the gospel to Greeks in Athens. He had to start with connecting to their understanding of the existence of god(s) and from there, the God who created the world:

Acts 17:24 The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

A tract may be helpful for a new believer. But it very quickly becomes a crutch. I know this from experience. A message “from the heart” is likely

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more effective, more believable. But, God the Holy Spirit can use whatever you start with, and move forward in presenting the gospel to a person who is truly “searching.” Also, you have to be careful if you use a tract. Does it contain correct information. Does it contain sufficient information to connect with the person you are talking to?

The first tract I used was from “Campus Crusade for Christ” now known as “CRU.” It was called the Four Spiritual Laws.

The “Four Spiritual Laws”

Law 1: God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

Law 2: Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life.

Law 3: Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life.

Law 4: We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives.

Review the Four Spiritual Laws tract. It is available at website:
https://crustore.org/media/wysiwyg/pdf/Four_Spiritual_Laws_English_.pdf

Note there are some shortcomings from my perspective.

1. God as creator. In today’s social climate, it may be necessary to identify who God is, just as Paul did in Acts chapters 14 and 17.

2. Righteousness of God. In this church, we know that the penalty of sin is taken care of by Jesus Christ’s work on the cross. Sin is not the issue in salvation, the Righteousness of God is the issue. Yes, it is important to mention sin and the sin nature. We as imperfect creatures are separated from a perfect God. But to have fellowship with God, we need His Righteousness. The only way to acquire God’s Righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ.

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3. Faith versus invitation. Salvation is by faith, not by inviting Christ into your life. Faith is about trusting Jesus Christ and His work on the cross to provide eternal salvation.

R. B. Thieme Jr. started one of his basic doctrine courses with seven propositions. They are a good orientation and a rationale to listening to doctrine. For the unbeliever that doctrine is the gospel.

Thieme’s Propositions

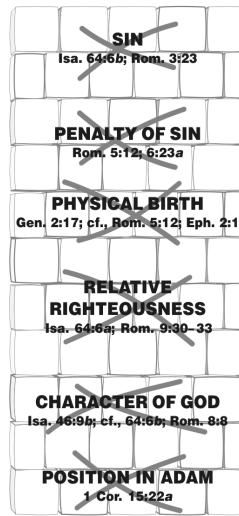
1. God exists eternally.
2. God reveals
3. God reveals Himself in a way that makes organized sense (organized categorically)
4. God has a Plan
5. I am human: therefore God has a plan for me.
6. I owe God a hearing
7. Opportunity comes through the teaching of Basic Doctrine.

This was originally taught in the 1960’s. So most people understood who God is. Today, it may be necessary to introduce the concept of creation and God as the creator. The points were not tailored for unbelievers but for believers who need to hear doctrine taught frequently.

For salvation, Thieme had an illustration of what he called the barrier. The second point of the Four Spiritual Laws says, “Man is sinful and separated from God.” The barrier explains that in detail. However it uses words that many believers are unfamiliar with.

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THE BARRIER



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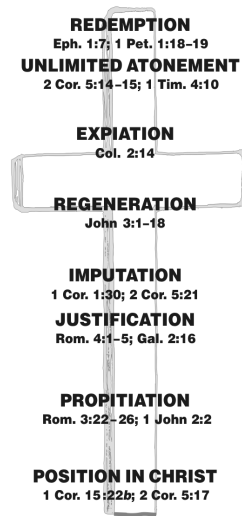


Illustration from the book *The Barrier*
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Website: https://www.rbthieme.org/images/Illustrations/TheBarrier_2a.gif

I suspect that one of the reasons the Risley family is so successful is that the message is given by someone who is obviously a believer. In other words, the witness of the life. When an unbeliever becomes a believer and then turns around and gives the gospel message to a family member, it comes from the heart. A tract can easily become an impediment. The unbeliever might turn to the gospel-giver and say, “What do you believe? Tell me in your own words.

But remember, God the Holy Spirit is in charge. He convinces. You just have to provide the information. When the Risley family started out in Mexico, they started with the “Jesus Film” and not much skill in speaking Spanish. But God the Holy Spirit propelled them forward.