

# Fundamentals of the Gospel

by William MacDonald

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*The gospel is a wonderful story of love, about God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, which we receive by faith and not by works.*

**Duration:** 37:40

**Topics:** "Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of maintaining enthusiasm for the Gospel. He acknowledges that sometimes believers can lose their passion over time. The speaker shares a story from National Geographic about a young man who embarked on a journey to find himself and his roots. The sermon also highlights the significance of demonstrating one's faith through good works and shares an anecdote about a Christian student who showed compassion to an alcoholic classmate.

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## Transcript

This morning I'd like to speak on a very familiar theme, and that is the fundamentals of the gospel. The gospel is a wonderful story of love, and it would be a shame ever to speak about the gospel without being enthusiastic, and yet I'm afraid that sometimes we do lose our enthusiasm, don't we? We take it for granted, oh yes, I was saved 47 years ago, but somehow or other we don't have the verb and we don't have the enthusiasm that we had then. I think perhaps that's why new converts are often the best soul winners.

People are not so much drawn by the cleverness of our words as by the impression that we really mean it and that we're enthusiastic about it. Who wouldn't be enthusiastic when you think of the Lord of life and glory coming down into this world to seek and to save that which was lost? When you think of a God who can reach down to the dunghill and take people of the sinners of the deepest die and save them by his matchless grace and transform their lives down here and make them heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ and destine them to eternal glory, to be one day conformed to the image of his Son, it's enough to make angels gasp. And I really think that if we could just somehow convey to men and women around us the good news of the glory of God as it's been revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, surely you'd think they'd fall at his feet and worship him.

Wonderful story of love. Well, we want to think this morning about the gospel, the fundamentals of the gospel, and we begin first of all with the need for salvation. Why did this gospel ever arise? Why did God ever have to devise this marvelous plan of salvation? And of course, the need for the gospel is found in a

simple three-letter word, sin.

S-I-N. The verses previous to the ones that Larry wrote are all about that. That's where God begins.

God begins with the subject of sin. We learn that all men are sinners in the Bible. There's not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way.

The fact of man's sin is written in the Bible. The fact of man's sin is written in the newspaper or in Time magazine. Not an issue that you could pick up, but is filled with the sordidness and rottenness of the heart of man.

Truly, the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. Above all things, who can know it? The sin of man is written on the graffiti of the walls of civilization. And I know that the Bible is true.

I know that all men are sinners. I look into my own heart and I look into the hearts of men and women around me and I know it's true. If you have any doubt about your own sinfulness this morning, I would just invite you to examine your thought life and tell me, is that above reproach? Does your thought life come short of the thought life of God? Well, that's what sin is.

Come short of the glory of God. What are you in the dark? Are you as pure in the dark as you are in the light that exposes the sinfulness of our lives? What are you when you are alone? Are you the same as when you are with others? Can you honestly say, I have loved the Lord, my God, with all my soul, heart, mind and strength and my neighbor as myself? Can you say you have never lied, that you have never stolen or broken any of the other of the Ten Commandments? Well, the Bible has passed this condemnation upon all men. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Sin came in to mar God's wonderful creation and God looked down and he saw a world in chaos, a world in ruins, a world that he had made. And of course, we read very clearly in the scripture that the wages of sin is death. And we can think of that in two ways, of course.

It's death as far as spiritual separation from God now is concerned. The unsaved man is dead as far as God is concerned. He has no life Godward.

He doesn't like God. He's only happy when he can forget God and only sad when he remembers him. What are the marks of an unsaved man? That he's uncomfortable around the things of God.

He's uncomfortable around prayer, around the word of God, and around the discussion of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the wages of sin is death in another way, and that is eternal death, eternal banishment and separation from God. What an awful thing to think that men will bargain their eternal destiny for a few years of sinful pleasure down here.

Some of you have heard the name of Aaron Burr. I don't know what comes to your mind when you hear that name. But Aaron Burr was a grandson of Jonathan Edwards, the great evangelical preacher.

And when Aaron Burr was a student at Princeton University, Jonathan Edwards came there and a great revival broke out as he preached the word of God. One day he spoke on the mastery of Jesus. And Aaron Burr was deeply convicted, deeply convicted of his sin and his need for a savior.

He was troubled in his heart. And he went to one of his favorite professors and asked him what he should do. And the professor said, don't make any decision in the emotion of the moment.

Aaron Burr went back to his room that night. He went over to the window. He pulled the shade.

And he looked out upon the moonlit scene and he said, oh, God, if you leave me alone, I'll leave you alone forever. He went on to receive the best grades that Princeton University had ever given out up to that time. In later years, he had a duel with Alexander Hamilton and killed him, you remember.

And then he betrayed his country. Perhaps when I mentioned his name, that's what came to your mind. Aaron Burr, the traitor.

Sixty years after that revival in Princeton, a man came to him one day and said, there's someone I'd like to introduce you to. His name is Jesus Christ. And Aaron Burr broke out in a cold sweat.

And he said, sixty years ago, I told God if he'd leave me alone, I'd leave him alone. And he's never bothered me since then. And he made his decision.

He passed out into eternity. Eternity, as far as we know, without God and without Christ and without salvation. What a terrible thing.

A man created in the image and asked to the likeness of God. For the gift of eternal life proffered to him without cost. He turned his back on it.

He said, oh God, if you leave me alone, I'll leave you alone forever. And he did. The wages of sin is death.

And that brings us to the third thing, and that is the source of salvation. And when I think of the source of salvation, I think of that wonderful word, grace. Grace.

Salvation, of course, is of the Lord. It's all of the Lord. Jonah learned that lesson in the belly of the great fish.

Grace is one of the most marvelous themes that the human intellect has ever been occupied with. In some ways, it's the king of all the attributes of God. God's marvelous grace, reaching down to hell deserving sinners and showering upon them the glory of heaven.

It's a wonderful thing. No wonder we sing amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. There's a lovely little gospel story in the National Geographic for April 1977. The last place in the world I ever expected to find the gospel, National Geographic.

I can find evolution there from time to time, but I never saw anything favorable to the Savior. It's a lovely story there about a young man from upstate New York who graduated from college and needed to find himself, as they say. I guess he needed to go back and find his roots, and so he decided to hike across the United States.

If he was offered a ride, he would not accept the ride. The article tells a most interesting account of his hike down from New York toward New Orleans. Finally, he got to Mobile, Alabama on the way.

Just a worldly young fellow looking for meaning in life, I think. When he was in Mobile, Alabama, some friends there invited him out to a wild party. As he was there, he also saw some advertisements for a gospel campaign that was going on, Jim Robeson.

He tells of how the windmill began to turn in his life, and the ding-dong struggle began within him, whether he should go to the wild party or whether he should go to the gospel meeting. He had never paid much attention to these Jesus meetings at all, and had no time for them in his life. But finally, he decided he would not go to the wild party, and he took his camera, and his pretext would be that he would go and take pictures of this rousing gospel meeting in the South.

And so he went into the auditorium, 10,000 people there, and he had his camera, and he went down toward the front to get his pictures. Robeson stood up and preached the gospel, and God began working in this young fellow's life. And Robeson finally gave an invitation for all who'd like to trust the Lord Jesus to come forward, and about 300 people moved forward in the auditorium, and this young fellow wrote, was that me standing there with them? And the answer, of course, is that it was he.

God had touched his heart, and he had been deeply moved by the presentation of the gospel, and especially by the earnestness and enthusiasm with which Robeson had spoken. Robeson stood there before them, and he said, I want to know, do you really trust the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Savior? But he said, I said, I do, and I meant it. And Robeson asked them again, I want to know, do you really mean this? Are you real about this? I don't want you to be false.

And they're all subscribed to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he tells of the change that came over, the peace that came to his heart that night that he had never known before. He had not gone to the wild party, he had gone to another kind of a party that was much more meaningful in his life.

And he said, as I went away, I had a new insight into the meaning of those words, amazing grace. God's amazing grace had caught up with this young American out looking for meaning in life. He never even got to New Orleans.

The Lord caught up with him in Mobile, Alabama. What wonderful grace it is that reaches down to you and me. You know, I tremble when I think that that I said to the Lord at times what Aaron Burr said, that I asked the Holy Spirit at times to leave me alone.

I'm glad he didn't. Wonderful grace that reaches down to a Charles Colson, isn't it? To an Eldridge Cleaver, to a George Foreman, to a Saul of Tarsus, to a Mary Magdalene. He writes us all in the body of Christ to be with him and like him forever.

Yes, the source of our salvation is the wonderful grace of God. And what is the basis of salvation? We mean by that. How can God do that? God is a holy God, and God hates sin, and God must punish sin, and God cannot look with favor upon sin.

How can he ever take us into his embrace? That's the question. And of course, the answer to that is found in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the basis upon which we're saying we read that Larry read it today, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.

Declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed. So the source of salvation is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. There is a fable told of an ancient king named Zeleucus, who passed a law, and the penalty for breaking that law was that a person's both eyes were to be put out.

One of the first ones to break the law was the king's own son. That was the king himself who had passed the law, and he ordered that son to come into his presence, and he ordered that one of his eyes be put out. But the law had to be fulfilled, and so he ordered that one of his own eyes be put out, and thus the claims of the law were met.

And in doing that, the king demonstrated two things. He demonstrated, first of all, his love for his son. He demonstrated, secondly, his respect for the law that had been passed.

And every time that son looked at his father, he was reminded that his father really loved him, that his father held the law as sacred and could not pass by the law, but must insist that its demands be met. That's exactly what we have in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We have the demonstration of how God can save and still be righteous.

The perfect righteousness of God is witnessed in the Savior's blood. It is in the cross of Christ we see how God can save, yet righteous be. God could not pass the sinner by.

The law demands that he must die, but in the cross of Christ we trace his righteousness, yet wondrous grace. The sin alights on Jesus' head, because in his death, sin's debt is paid. Stern justice can demand no more, and mercy can dispense her store.

The sinner who believes is free can say, the Savior died for me, can point to the atoning blood and say, that made my peace with God. Dear friends, the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary made you and me savable. It made us savable.

It tells us how a holy God can save unholy sinners and still be just in doing it. He caused all the penalty of our sins to be placed upon the Lord Jesus, and he there in that sacred body bore it all. He bore an infinity of punishment for us, the punishment we should have endured throughout all eternity.

So we have the need for salvation. We have sin. That's the need for salvation.

We have the wages of sin, death. We have the source of salvation. Well, that's the grace of God.

That's where it all begins. The basis of salvation, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the cross of Calvary, the price of salvation, the precious blood, an unpopular subject in even many evangelical circles today. The whole tendency is to soft pedal the subject of the blood of Christ.

Sure, you've noticed that, but there it is repeated over and over again in the scriptures of blood of Jesus Christ. God's son cleanses us from all sin. You're not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold from the vain tradition handed down to you from the fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without spot and without blemish.

Precious, precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary shed for rebels, shed for sinners, shed for me. Isn't it marvelous to think of God coming down to this planet and taking a human body, a body of flesh and blood in order that he might pour out that life which the blood represents for me during marvelous, wonderful savior, wonderful friend, wonderful love that never shall end. Wonderful place.

He's gone to prepare wonder of wonders. I shall be there. The blood is the scarlet thread that runs through all of scripture.

Abel took that sacrifice and shed the blood and that sacrifice atoned for the sin in a sense, covered the sin of one man. Later on, we come to the Paschal lamb. The blood was sprinkled upon the door that atoned for the sin of one family.

Then in the sixteenth of Leviticus, we come to the great day of atonement and there the blood atoned for the sins of the nation didn't really put them away, just covered them. But then we come to Calvary's land and the blood puts away the sin of the world sufficient in its efficacy to put away the sin of the world. That's what John the Baptist denounced.

Behold, the lamb of God that take it away the sin of the world. But does that mean everybody's safe? No, it doesn't mean that it's available to everybody. However, the availability of the gospel, the answer to that one is whosoever that whosoever believe upon him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And I believe that as I stand here this morning, I don't believe that there's any man or woman, boy or girl who wouldn't be saved if he trusted the sinner's savior. Christ's death is sufficient for all the sins that have ever been committed, for all the sins that are being committed now, for all the sins that ever will be committed.

That blood has infinite value to cover an infinite number of sins. And so there's the availability whosoever will may come to the Jew first and also to the Greek. But that brings us to a very important point, and that is the manner of reception.

How is this gospel received? And of course, the answer to that is by faith, by faith. This has always been the gospel down through the centuries, from the very beginning, the entrance of sin until now. God has always been by faith in the Lord on the basis of whatever revelation had been given to man at that time.

Perhaps we could just use an illustration of that. The manner of reception. Supposing we were in a time of great famine and there was a great warehouse down on MacArthur Boulevard, and there's a sign out in front and it says, whoever is hungry, let him come in and he'll receive a loaf of bread.

Now, the question is, who gets a loaf? And somebody might say to me, well, whoever is hungry. That isn't right. Read the sign a little further.

It says, whoever is hungry, let him come in and he'll receive a loaf by being hungry. You get the loaf by coming in. Let him come in.

As long as a man stays outside, you'll never get a loaf to die of starvation. But if he comes in, then he receives the loaf. But that's exactly the way it is with the gospel.

The Lord Jesus has finished the work. Salvation is available for everyone, but you have to come in. You have to come to the Lord Jesus in simple, trusting faith, acknowledging him as Lord and Savior in your life.

I've always been intrigued with the story of a man who went into a Sears store down in the South on a hot summer day. He was very, very thirsty, and he asked the clerk where the water fountain was. The clerk directed him over to a fountain by the wall, and he went over there, and he noticed above the drinking fountain the sign that said, stoop and drink.

He immediately started looking for the faucet or the button, the faucet to turn or the button to push, but he couldn't find him. So he looked below the drinking fountain for a pedal that he might stand on, but there

wasn't any pedal there. He looked again, and the sign still said the same thing, stoop and drink.

And so he started to analyze it from a scientific basis and tried to figure out what was the way of getting the water out of that fountain. And he never did find out until he obeyed the sign. Now, the moment he stooped over, the electric eye picked that up, and the water began to flow.

Stoop and drink. And really, that's the way it is with salvation too, isn't it? Stoop first and drink. Come to Christ as it were on your knees.

Come in confession of sin. Come in repentance and drink the water of life. But there is an emphatic exclusion, and I don't think we've really done justice to the fundamentals of the gospel until we remind ourselves of that emphatic exclusion.

It says, not of works lest any man should boast. We read this morning, for by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight. I have often said that I believe the most deep-rooted heresy in the human heart throughout the world is the heresy of salvation by good works.

And it's the hardest thing to extricate from the human heart. Man has the basic assurance in his perverted mind that he can somehow work his way to heaven. But by not being as bad as other people in the community, God will at last accept him.

And so the word of God, and all through the New Testament, we find this emphatic exclusion, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved. No wonder the gospel is in a sense offensive to the unregenerate human heart. And it is.

It's offensive to the unsaved heart of man, because it tells him that he can't raise his little finger to save his soul. And the sooner he quits trying, the better off he's going to be. For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. An emphatic exclusion. But let's add number nine, the goal of salvation unto good works.

This is God's will for us. For we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. God's will is that those who have come to Christ in simple trusting faith should go out and show it to the world by lives of good works.

I really believe that this is God's normal method of evangelization for Christian people, to go out by the combination of lip testimony and a life of good works to show that they belong to Christ and that he has revolutionized their lives. I remember reading years ago of a young university student, Christian fellow, and at this particular university there was another young fellow who was an alcoholic, and he was really repulsive to most of his classmates. He was really so given to alcohol, and they all shunned him, and after a while he was even put out of his room in the dormitory because he just had absolutely no self-control at all.

He began to speak to the heart of this Christian fellow, and one day he went to this alcoholic student. He said to him, I hear that you're without a place to live. He said, well, that was true, and he said, well, he said, I have a place, and he said, if you'd like to move in with me, he said, you may.

And so this fellow did, and he was just as vile and repulsive as ever, and the Christian fellow used to have to clean up after he had vomited all over the carpet. He'd have to undress him and bathe him and put him to bed and all the rest, and without a whimper and without a murmur, the Christian fellow just lavished kindness and love upon this seemingly unworthy fellow, and it began to get to him. One day he said to the Christian, look here, he said, what is it that you're after? And the Christian said, I'm after your soul, and he got it.

He led that fellow to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, saved unto good works, the goal, and then the glorious results, the glorious results, saved from hell. What a wonderful deliverance that is.

Every one of us today who's a Christian here can really say in honesty before God, I deserve to be in hell. That's the truth. I deserve to be in hell for all eternity.

By the grace of God, I've been saved from that terrible condemnation and now made fit for heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ. Wonderful story of a man. That's only the beginning.

We wouldn't have time to tell all the glorious results, all the wonderful things that take place the moment a person trusts the Lord Jesus as Savior. He's saved, he's redeemed, he's forgiven, he receives the indwelling Holy Spirit, he's baptized by the Spirit in the body of Christ, he receives the earnest, the seal, the anointing. It's just too wonderful for words.

So there we have the wonderful fundamentals of the gospel, and it all comes down to the simple acceptance of a simple offer. There's a little animal called the mole. Nobody has ever seen a living mole with its eyes open, but nobody has ever seen a dead mole with its eyes shut.

The moment it dies, its eyes are open. I'm afraid that's the way it is with a lot of people today. They go through life with their eyes closed to the issues of eternity.

Dear friends, the moment they die, their eyes are open. Where will you be five minutes after you die? We're going to look to the Lord in closing prayer, and then I'm going to ask Don to come to the organ and perhaps play that little chorus that's on the blue sheet in our book. He's the Savior of my soul.

Just sing it softly as the meeting comes to a close. Shall we bow in prayer? Father, we do come to you this morning with full hearts. When we think of the love that you have showered upon us, when we think of the grace that sent the Lord Jesus, the Son of your love, to die for us, to take our place, to bear the punishment, the guilt, the condemnation that we deserved to go all the way to California for us.

And now we thank you, O God, for the wonderful salvation that you provide through faith in him. Thank you for all those in our meeting today who have trusted him, who know that they're saved and on the way to heaven. Should there be any here today, Lord, who do not have this clear assurance, we pray, O God, that you'll speak to such hearts.

They might not, like Aaron Burr, ask you to go away. They might say, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. There's room in my heart for thee.

Dwell in my heart, Lord Jesus, for time and eternity. Speak through your word today. We ask it in the Savior's name and for his sake.

Amen. Amen.

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