

# The Gospel for a Preschooler

Growing Kids (and all ages!) in the Faith

- ✦ We want kids to be learning from a young age how to be active disciples of Jesus and participants in the work of his kingdom.
- ✦ Therefore, need to teach the message of the Gospel in ways that will be meaningful to and spiritually relevant for even very young children.



# How to explain the Gospel to a preschooler?

- ✦ Key requirements for a successful “Gospel for a preschooler”:
  - ✦ Gives the Good News **itself**, rather than some theological theory **about** the Gospel
  - ✦ Doesn't require knowledge or concepts beyond a preschooler's grasp in order to make sense

# The Gospel

# The Gospel according to Jesus

- ✦ “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and have faith in the good news!” (Mark 1:15)
- ✦ Succinct and powerful statement
  - ✦ ... but assumes **a lot** of contextual knowledge in the hearers (which was appropriate in the original context)
- ✦ For other contexts and hearers, need to “translate” and then teach.

# The Gospel for a preschooler

Jesus died and came alive again so that one day he can make everyone who dies come alive again. He's going to make the whole world good, and he wants us to help!

- ✦ Everything else in Christian theology is elaboration, implication, and details.

Jesus died and came alive again so that one day he can make everyone who dies come alive again. He's going to make the whole world good, and he wants us to help!

Who is this guy?

Why did he die?

Why did he come alive again?

How did he come alive again?

Who is everyone else?

Why do they die?

Why do they come alive again?

How will they come alive again?

How will he make the whole world good?

When will he do this?

What does it mean for us to help?



# The Big Story of God and the World

# The Big Story

- ✦ In all Christian teaching, need to give both the Gospel message and the “big story” of God and the world. Especially true for kids.
- ✦ Gospel: the core message, the key proclamation that assumes & implies much more
- ✦ The Big Story of God and the world: rich content & gives Gospel its context, but is large and can be harder for kids to wrap their minds around at first.

# The Big Story

1. God made a good world
2. God made humans to help make his world better
  - ✦ Humans at peace with God, one another, & world
  - ✦ Possibility for everlasting life if remain in good relationship with God

# The Big Story

3. Humans rebel, become estranged from God, and thus also in conflict with one another & world
  - ✦ Lose opportunity to gain everlasting life, become subject to corruption
4. God works through history to accomplish his goals for the world (incl. for us) anyway.
  - ✦ Thus his long history of relationship with Israel

# The Big Story

5. Jesus' first advent was key to making the attainment of these goals possible
  - ✦ God with us to reconcile estrangement, rescue us from corruption, make everlasting life possible
6. Jesus' second advent will bring the ultimate accomplishment of these goals
  - ✦ Transformation, resurrection, completion of all

# Gospel and Big Story

- ✦ Teaching the Christian faith to kids by
  1. Using basic Gospel as grounding touchstone for our teachings to kids (or anyone), and
  2. Setting our teaching in the context of the Big Story
- ✦ ... allows kids to learn Bible stories, spiritual practices, etc., not as piecemeal bits, but as part of a consistent

How this approach to teaching the  
Gospel helps our kids become disciples

# Learning to be like Jesus

- ✦ Coming to know...
  - ✦ who Jesus is,
  - ✦ why he chose to come, die, and rise, and
  - ✦ what his ultimate goals for the world are
- ✦ ... enables kids to model themselves on Jesus



# Full-formed discipleship

- ✦ Reinforces the “Head, Heart, Hands” guiding structure of discipleship
- ✦ Good understanding → well formed hearts → works of the kingdom
- ✦ Understanding not only *what* Jesus cares about, but *why* he cares and *how* we can follow his way well

- Intro:
  - In the Vineyard, we want kids to be learning from a young age how to become active disciples of Jesus and participants in the work of his kingdom here and now. Vital to accomplishing that goal is finding ways to teach the message of the Gospel in ways that will be meaningful and spiritually relevant for even very young children.
- Gospel for a preschooler
  - [Tell brief story of my own attempt to formulate the most essential and core element of our Christian faith—the fundamental Gospel message itself—in a way that would be understandable for my then three-year-old daughter. It wasn't easy!]
    - Key things I realized were necessary for a successful “Gospel for a preschooler”:
      - Gives the Good News *itself*, rather than some theological theory *about* the Gospel
      - Doesn't require knowledge or concepts beyond a preschooler's grasp in order to make sense
  - The Gospel for a preschooler: **Jesus died and came alive again, so that one day he can make everyone who dies come alive again. He is going to make the whole world good, and he wants us to help!**
    - Note: this way of expressing the Gospel message might seem a bit unfamiliar to those of us who are used to seeing the topics of sin, guilt, repentance, and forgiveness being given a more explicit and prominent role. But (1) those topics are in fact rolled up into this statement (see below), and (2) it is important to remember that liberation from death into everlasting life with Christ is the fundamental Good News, whereas forgiveness of sin is important *because* that forgiveness is necessary in order for us to enter everlasting life.
  - Unpacking this simple message via simply phrased questions leads to the unfolding of all the many aspects of Christian theology. For example:
    - “Who is this Jesus person?” → Christology and thus Trinitarian theology
    - “Who is everyone else?” → creation and humanity
    - “Why do they die?” → sin and evil
    - “Why did he die?” → the atonement component of salvation
    - “Why did he come alive again?” → the redemptive side of salvation
    - “How did he come alive again?” → the Holy Spirit and thus Trinitarian theology from another route
    - “How will they come alive again?” → eschatology
    - “Why do they come alive again?” → ecclesiology (via the concept of the people of God)

- “How will he make the whole world good?” unfolds all of pneumatology and eschatology (incl. the concept of the kingdom of God) by another route
- “What does it mean for us to help?” → the “getting saved” and “living saved” aspects of salvation, pneumatology (once again), and ecclesiology
- Gospel and the Big Story of God and the world - kids need both.
  - Gospel: the core message, the key proclamation that assumes & implies much more
  - The Big Story of God and the world: rich content & gives Gospel its context, but is large and can be harder for kids to wrap their minds around at first.
  - By using the basic Gospel as grounding touchstone that one comes back to again and again in our kids’ ministry allows kids to learn Bible stories, spiritual practices, etc., not as piecemeal bits, but as part of the Big Story of God and the world.
  - [Give example outline of the Big Story]
  - If we always make sure to connect all of our different teachings for kids back to the basic gospel message, on the one hand, and always make sure to set it into the context of the Big Story, we can reinforce all the different elements in ways that will deeply engrain them into the hearts, minds, and souls of our kids.
- How this approach to teaching the Gospel helps our kids become disciples
  - Coming to know who Jesus is, why he chose to come, die, and rise, and what his ultimate goals for the world are enables kids to model themselves on Jesus.
    - Includes forgiveness, sacrifice, love, creation care, praying for people, being filled with the Spirit, listening to the Spirit, doing what the Father’s doing (which means they need to learn about the Old Testament), seeing the unseen, compassion, etc, etc, etc.
    - E.g. learning to pray for the people in an ambulance that goes by, to be kind to the child in class who is mistreated by others, etc.
  - Reinforces the “Head, Heart, Hands” guiding structure of discipleship
    - Understanding more of the essential and big picture ideas of our faith helps to form hearts (of both kids and adults!) because it helps us to understand not only *what* Jesus cares about and *that* he wants us to follow his way, but moreover *why* Jesus cares about those things and *how* we can follow his way well.