

## The Essence of the Gospel

The Gospel message proclaims a loving and merciful God, who sent His own Son to die for the sins of all people.

Why then do worldviews discount the Gospels and Jesus, picturing the Christian God as exclusive and cruel? How should we, as Christians, respond to such worldviews?

## The Essence of the Gospel

### •Who I am:

- Dr. Jonathan Strand
- Professor of Philosophy,
  - Concordia University College of Alberta
- Ph.D., Philosophy
  - University of Notre Dame
- M.Div., AFLTS, Minnesota
- B.A. Philosophy, *summa cum laude*
  - University of Minnesota

### –Specialties:

- Logic, Philosophy of Religion, Phil. of Science

## The Essence of the Gospel

If the Gospel is true,  
there is a solution to every problem  
plaguing humanity.

- I want, very badly, for it to be true!
- In fact, it would be easy to suspect I'm guilty of "wishful thinking."

## The Essence of the Gospel

- People's beliefs are, in fact, heavily influenced *by their desires*.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- People's beliefs are, in fact, heavily influenced *by their desires*.
- If our desire for it to be true influences us to believe,
  - what about those who **don't** believe?

## The Essence of the Gospel

- People's beliefs are, in fact, heavily influenced *by their desires*.
- If our desire for it to be true influences us to believe,
  - what about those who **don't** believe?
- I believe that people's *desires* stand in the way of their accepting the gospel far more than their *intellect* does.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- Many people don't believe the gospel largely because they *don't want* it to be true.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- Many people don't believe the gospel largely because they *don't want* it to be true.
- But this means that if we want people to accept the gospel we need to help them see what incredibly good news it is!

### The Essence of the Gospel

- We need to present the gospel in such a way that it is *obvious* what good news it is.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- We need to present the gospel in such a way that it is *obvious* what good news it is.
- Some questions to help people see what good news the gospel is:
  - helps them see what a dire situation we're all in if the gospel is *not* true:

### Questions for Those Who Doubt

- How do you handle all the evil in the world?

### Questions for Those Who Doubt

More specifically:

- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- More specifically:
- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.
  - Very bad things can happen to any of us at any moment.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- More specifically:
- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.
  - Very bad things can happen to any of us at any moment.
  - Your character is seriously flawed.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- More specifically:
- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.
  - Very bad things can happen to any of us at any moment.
  - Your character is seriously flawed.
  - Horrendous evils happen to many people in this world.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- More specifically:
- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.
  - Very bad things can happen to any of us at any moment.
  - Your character is seriously flawed.
  - Horrendous evils happen to many people in this world.
  - We cannot figure out the most important truths for ourselves (with any certainty).

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- More specifically:
- How do you handle the following facts?
  - You, and everyone you love, is going to die.
  - Very bad things can happen to any of us at any moment.
  - Your character is seriously flawed.
  - Horrendous evils happen to many people in this world.
  - We cannot figure out the most important truths for ourselves (with any certainty).
  - If an absolutely perfect God exists,  
how could He accept *you*?

## The Essence of the Gospel

- How people handle all this:

### The Essence of the Gospel

- How people handle all this:
  - Try not to think about it.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- How people handle all this:
  - Try not to think about it.
    - Keep yourself distracted
    - Drugs

### The Essence of the Gospel

- How people handle all this:
  - Try not to think about it.
    - Keep yourself distracted
    - Drugs
  - Trust in some other “gospel”

### Questions for Those Who Doubt

- How likely is it  
that the things you put your trust in,  
or the ways you “handle” all evil,  
really can and will save you  
from these things,  
or solve these problems?

### The Essence of the Gospel

- The gospel promises a solution to *all* these problems.
- Nothing else someone could trust in, or use to “handle” the evil in the world,
  - *can* solve these problems, if true,
  - *and* has a high probability of actually being true.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- Every alternative to the gospel either
  - *offers little hope,*
  - or is unlikely to actually be true.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Every alternative to the gospel either
  - offers *little hope*,
  - or is unlikely to actually be true.
- Nothing else which would offer real hope, if true, is actually likely to *be* true.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Major objection:
  - Doesn't all this evil in the world show that the Christian gospel (probably) isn't true?
  - Doesn't the evil show that the God Christians believe in (probably) doesn't exist?
    - Surely such an utterly good and loving, and all-powerful God would never allow all this evil.
    - So it is very unlikely that such a God exists, and so the Christian gospel is very unlikely also.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Major objection:
  - Doesn't all this evil in the world show that the Christian gospel (probably) isn't true?
- Answer:
  - No. The evil does *not* show that:

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Major objection:
  - Doesn't all this evil in the world show that the Christian gospel (probably) isn't true?
- Answer:
  - No. The evil does *not* show that:  
Main reason:
    - It is *not obviously unlikely* that God may have reasons for allowing all this evil, even if I/we don't know what they are.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- I can think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing some evils:

## The Essence of the Gospel

- I can think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing some evils:
  - He could allow some evils to use them to make us better people.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- I can think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing some evils:
  - He could allow some evils to use them to make us better people.
  - He must allow us to do *bad* things, for us to have the freedom to do truly morally good things.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- I can think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing some evils:
  - He could allow some evils to use them to make us better people.
  - He must allow us to do *bad* things, for us to have the freedom to do truly morally good things.
  - He must allow some evils to have a world in which “laws of nature” hold.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- I can think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing some evils:
  - Perhaps God allows us to experience a bit of the independence-from-God we all choose, so we'll learn how awful that would be and start *wanting* (i.e., loving) Him.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- My being able to think of plausible reasons God could have for allowing various evils makes more plausible the idea that God may have good reasons for allowing *all* the evil He allows.

### The Essence of the Gospel

- Most importantly, however:
  - Given the difference between my mind and God's mind:
  - Doesn't it seem *highly likely* that God may have good reasons for allowing various evils, which reasons I have no idea about?
  - Isn't it plausible that He may have reasons I may not even be able to *comprehend*?

### The Essence of the Gospel

- If it isn't *obviously impossible* or *unlikely* that God may have good reasons for allowing all this evil, this evil does *not* show that God (even probably) doesn't exist.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

A diagnostic question:

- Do you *want* Christianity to be true?

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

A diagnostic question:

- Do you *want* Christianity to be true?
- Wouldn't it be incredibly *good news* if it were true?

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
- (Why many don't see the gospel as *good news*:)
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.
    - They have too low a concept of God.
      - A small, unloving, capricious god.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.
    - They have too low a concept of God.
    - They do not comprehend God's *unconditional* acceptance because of Jesus.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.
    - They have too low a concept of God.
    - They do not comprehend God's *unconditional* acceptance because of Jesus.
  - They believe it would be *bad news* for them or those they love.
    - They do not comprehend the lengths to which God will go to win them over.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.
  - They believe it would be *bad* news for them or those they love.
  - They don't want to be *wrong*.
    - This isn't a competition.
    - Our message isn't about *Christians*, or who is right; it's about *Jesus*.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- Why people *don't want* Christianity to be true:
  - Most simply *misunderstand* it.
  - They believe it would be *bad* news for them or those they love.
  - They don't want to be *wrong*.
  - They're unwilling to give up their sin.
    - But part of the good news is that God will *save us from ourselves*—from our corrupt natures.

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Given what the Christian gospel promises,
  - if you really understood it,
  - wouldn't it be *morally corrupt*
  - not to *want* it to be true?

## Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Given what the Christian gospel promises,
  - if you really understood it,
  - wouldn't it be morally corrupt
  - not to *want* it to be true?
- Wouldn't that be consciously, explicitly, *choosing evil*?

## The Essence of the Gospel

- A suggestion to try then:
  - Before trying to convince someone that the gospel is true,
  - do whatever you can to help him/her see what *unbelievably good news* it is, if true.

## The Essence of the Gospel

- A suggestion to try then:
  - Before trying to convince someone that the gospel is true,
  - do whatever you can to help him/her see what *unbelievably good news* it is, if true.
- People who *want* it to be true are much more open to believing that it actually is true.

## **The Essence of the Gospel**

- Jesus really is,

## **The Essence of the Gospel**

- Jesus really is,

***our only hope.***