

CONTENTS

Introduction: From the Shadow of the Cross	9
1. The Gospel in Two-Part Harmony	13
2. Reaching Out by First Reaching Up	29
3. Donkeys and Elephants	41
4. The Gospel and O. J. Simpson	57
5. The Other Side of the Tracks	75
6. The Gospel and the Glory of God	93
7. Declaring the Whole Truth	109
8. Getting Comfortable with a Life of Dis-ease	119
9. Finishing Well	133
10. A Change Is Gonna Come	149
Notes	165
Acknowledgments	169



1 THE GOSPEL IN TWO-PART HARMONY

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out . . . in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the cross.¹

Tertullian

Albert Einstein was boarding a train one day, clearly preoccupied with something. While the other passengers were settling into their seats and preparing for the journey ahead, Dr. Einstein was frantically scanning the floors, lost in a search. One of the train crew noticed this and asked the brilliant scientist what he was trying to find. Albert responded that he had lost his ticket. The conductor waved the renowned Einstein off, assuring him that he need not look for his ticket because he knew exactly who he was. This was the man, after all, whom *Time* magazine would eventually label “the man of the twentieth century.” His discoveries in physics would astound the world and change how we view the universe.

But still, Dr. Albert Einstein continued his quest for the ticket, looking between the seats and down the aisles, ignoring the conductor. Some moments later this same man reiterated that Albert didn’t need to worry about finding his ticket, because again, everyone knew who he was, and surely this world-famous professor and Nobel laureate would not try to scam his way onto a train. “Relax, Dr. Einstein, we all know who you are,” the conductor said.

With a frustrated sigh, Professor Einstein responded, “It’s not that I

don't know who I am, I know exactly who I am. I'm looking for my ticket because I don't know where I'm going."²

The "Who Am I" and "Where Am I Going" Questions

Einstein's response to the train worker unearths for us two fundamental questions that every human being must face: (1) Who am I? and (2) Where am I going? Identity and direction lie at the core of humanity's soul. Fail to find the answers to these core questions, and life will be devoid of any possible meaning or satisfaction. Humanity's problem is not that men and women aren't looking for the answers to these questions; it's that most of them will spend their lives filling the blank spaces of their souls with the wrong answers.

So where can the right answers be found? Saul of Tarsus, a devout Jew, realized later in life he had been pursuing the answers for identity and direction in the wrong places. A well-educated man and very religious, he had been proud of his status as being from the same tribe of Israel that birthed her first king. As a religious Pharisee, he no doubt thought his identity could be found in his pedigree, education, and religion. He says so in Philippians 3:4–6. Yet later on Saul realized Jesus was the Christ, and he would become the humble apostle Paul. That brought about a remarkable change in attitude. His identity was no longer in himself. He wrote, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7–8).

Paul admits that he had spent his life pursuing the wrong answer, yet on a dusty Damascus road one day all of that changed when his life was transformed and revolutionized by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now in Christ he had found identity. That's why he told the Corinthians that if

we are in Christ, we are a new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17).

The gospel of Jesus Christ answers all of the questions and longings of our soul. Who am I? I am a child of God in relationship with the creator of the universe (John 1:12) because of the gospel. Where am I going? My direction and aim in life is found in the gospel.

Moving toward the *Zoe* Life

Since the gospel addresses our most basic needs and essential questions, God is most honored and life becomes alive when we have as our sole operating system the gospel of Jesus Christ—or what we will call in this book, the cross-shaped gospel. This is what Jesus taught His disciples when He announced that He had come “that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The Greeks had two primary words for *life*: *bios* (we get such words as *biology* from here) and *zoe*. *Bios* has to do with pure existence; you know, inhaling and exhaling. *Zoe*, on the other hand, refers to life on a qualitative level. *Zoe* describes a life rich with meaning, value, and significance. One of the great tragedies of life is that most people have *bios* life but not *zoe* life. According to Jesus, *zoe* living is found in Him and therefore in the gospel.

Most of us will live longer than the disciples did here on earth. By today’s standards, these men died relatively young. Very few of us, however, will have truly *lived* like they did, having that *zoe* life of value and significance. These men whom Jesus handpicked were so consumed by the gospel that they changed cities and their world. Along the way, they established churches that didn’t just exist from season to season but communities of people who were all plugged into the *zoe* life that the gospel provides. Like their fathers in the faith, these churches would turn the world upside-down for the glory of God. I want this for myself, and I hope you do too.

When it comes to living the cross-shaped gospel—a *zoe* life of significance that both worships God and helps those around us—most Christians



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are only halfway there. One part of the church of Jesus Christ has removed the horizontal beam of the cross and focused solely on the vertical—their relationship with God. Others who claim to love Jesus have detached the vertical beam, focusing instead on the horizontal beam—their rela-

relationship with others. Like a surgeon with an injured hand, both sides have discovered that their ability to engage their world for the glory of God has been severely impaired.

What we need is a two-part gospel—a holistic gospel, a gospel that loves both the Father and His Son, the Redeemer Jesus, and at the same time declares that love as it seeks the souls of the lost. We need to serve God and our fellow man. We need that two-part harmony!

Where Did We Go Wrong?

If asked to present the gospel, how would you go about that? When I'm asked to give the gospel, someone expects me to give a clear presentation followed by an invitation for people to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Now, I don't want to diminish this at all. In fact, the apostle Paul says that this is of first importance (1 Corinthians 15:3). Our soul's deepest longing is to be in relationship with God.

However, what I want to suggest is that this is not *all* that is meant by the gospel in the Scriptures. Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles knew that the gospel had profound social implications as well, creating bold new paradigms for both how people related to one another and how they engaged their world as well. Yet church history has revealed that the force of the gospel has been severely blunted, and lives negatively impacted

when we have divorced the horizontal dimensions of the gospel (our need to love and engage others) from the vertical (our need to love and engage God through His Son, Jesus Christ). Unfortunately, this separation has become the norm. It was Charles Spurgeon who once said that “One recurring tragedy of the Christian church . . . has been the separation of social ministries and spiritual, evangelistic ministries.”³

George Whitefield and the Gospel

One of the greatest proclaimers of the gospel in church history was the English evangelist George Whitefield. Before Billy Graham, it can be argued that no one preached the gospel in America and the United Kingdom to more people than Whitefield in the eighteenth century and D. L. Moody in the nineteenth century. Whitefield’s influence on how we view the gospel today is both positive and negative.

Possessed with Spirit-given abilities, Whitefield’s spellbinding dominance over his audience was such that masses of people flocked to hear him. In fact, so many people came that he could no longer preach in church buildings; he had to take to the fields. Over the span of his ministry, it is estimated that he preached over eighteen thousand times⁴ to millions of people. A person of his stature would go down as one of the greatest men God has ever used, but at the same time there was a severe blemish on his earthly record.

George Whitefield owned slaves. To be sure, he was not the only preacher of his time to do so. Jonathan Edwards, a man called America’s greatest theologian, did as well. What makes Whitefield stand out, though, is that it was because of this preacher of the gospel’s influence that Georgia legalized slavery. Using his friendship with General James Oglethorpe, founder of the colony of Georgia, Whitefield lobbied to have slavery legalized. In a letter written to Oglethorpe and the trustees of the Colony of Georgia, Whitefield pleaded his case:

“My chief end in writing this, is to inform you . . . that I am as willing

A CROSS-SHAPED GOSPEL

as ever to do all I can for Georgia and the Orphan House, if either a limited use of negroes is approved of, or some more indented servants [are] sent over. If not, I cannot promise to keep any large family, or cultivate the plantation in any considerable manner.”⁵

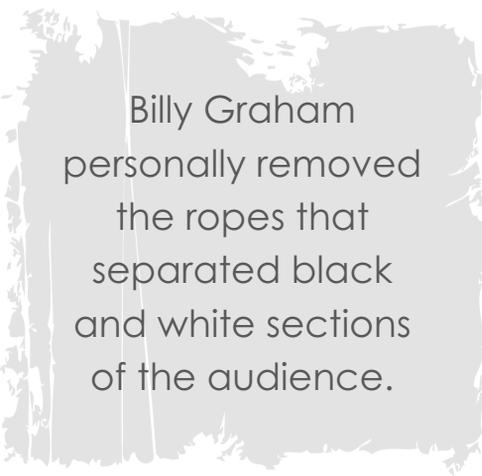
Whitefield’s biographer, Arnold Dallimore, remarks at the close of this letter, “Such was Whitefield’s urging of the Trustees to allow slavery in Georgia, and as stated earlier, we can but deplore both his attitude and his action. . . . In 1750 the British Government submitted to the wishes of the majority of the people of Georgia; Oglethorpe’s slaveless society was done away with and slavery was made a legal practice in the colony.”⁶

Tim Keller reminds us that we must always look for the sin beneath the sin, and when we examine George Whitefield’s desire to have slavery legalized in Georgia, we are forced to conclude that racism is not the ultimate issue. No, there’s a far greater problem. What kind of gospel did Whitefield preach that would allow the proclamation of Jesus Christ to millions of people—a man who died because God so loved the world—to coexist with lobbying for the legalization of slavery? Whitefield’s problem was not a race problem; it was a gospel problem. Whatever he may have purported to believe about the gospel, or to have preached, what is obvious for Whitefield is that in practice he understood the gospel to be almost solely in terms of my relationship with Christ to the exclusion of my relationship with others.

In fairness, Whitefield did preach to the slaves, which in that day was not very common, for it was thought among many white Christians that they did not have souls and were therefore not worthy of preaching to. Whitefield disagreed. And certainly God used many other deeply flawed Christian leaders. Yet Whitefield—and many believers to this day—compartmentalized the gospel, emphasizing salvation while neglecting God’s call to care for those in need.

Billy Graham Leads the Way

Billy Graham, the greatest evangelist of the twentieth century, understood the importance of preaching a gospel for all people. While some early crusades in the South were segregated, Graham quickly came to see that God wanted the walls between the races torn down—literally and figuratively. On March 15, 1953, just a few days into his crusade meetings in Chattanooga, Tennessee, he personally removed the ropes that separated the black and white sections of the audience. One year later, after the US Supreme Court ruled (in *Brown v. the Board of Education*) that separate schools for blacks and whites were unconstitutional, he began to practice integration, both in his crusades and on the platform. His crusade team included a preacher from India and later an African-American associate evangelist, Howard Owen Jones.⁷ Yet his emphasis was not civil rights but the gospel itself, that people would find salvation through Christ: “The ground at the foot of the cross is level, and it touches my heart when I see whites standing shoulder to shoulder with blacks at the cross.”⁸ Unfortunately, much of the evangelical church lagged behind Billy Graham in those days.



Billy Graham personally removed the ropes that separated black and white sections of the audience.

Jesus and the Gospel

Like the evangelists of the last three centuries, we must be careful to retain the gospel as presented by Jesus Christ. In Matthew 4, Jesus is facing hordes of people, all trying to get this new miracle worker’s attention. He

A CROSS-SHAPED GOSPEL

calls upon them to “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). Clearly, this is Jesus appealing for all to turn from their sins and follow Him. Repentance, as Jesus defined it and the likes of Whitefield and Finney understood it, was the need to surrender your heart to God and live a radically different life. But notice what happens next:

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the *gospel* of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. (4:23–25, emphasis added)

Later on in chapter 9, Matthew would note the same thing about the ministry of Jesus:

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the *gospel* of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (35–36, emphasis added)

Both passages intentionally say the same thing. No communicator repeats without wanting to drive home a point. In these two passages, Matthew is grabbing our collars, wanting us to understand something very important about the ministry of Jesus.

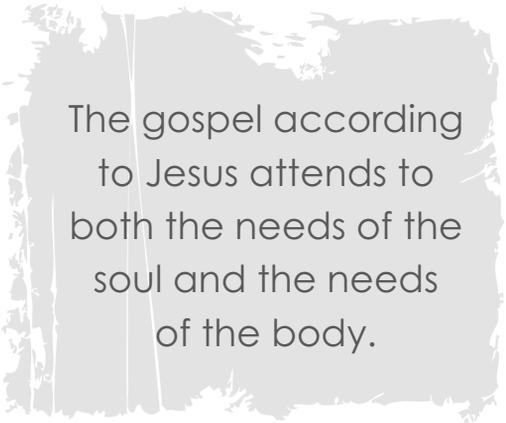
That is: *Jesus aids the oppressed and afflicted as well*. In other words, the gospel according to Jesus is spiritual with physical implications; it attends to both the needs of the soul and the needs of the body.

“You Feed Them”

In the middle of Matthew 14, Jesus is attracting a huge crowd, and many are seeking healing. The crowd is hungry, and the disciples petition Jesus to send them away so they can get their own food. Jesus, the one who should most be weary of the crowd, tells the disciples that they need to feed them. He orders the crowd to sit down, and taking five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish, He feeds them. As thousands finish their meal, Jesus slips out the back, hops in a boat, and takes off, with not one word being said.

Not one stanza of *Just as I Am* is sung. No one comes to the altar for salvation, because no one's been asked. But if I discard my twenty-first-century evangelical understanding of the gospel and look at it through the lens of Jesus, I'm forced to conclude that Christ's feeding the thousands who were gathered that day was very much a part, a demonstration if you will, of the gospel.

Something in us is uncomfortable with this. We want to call this social justice or compassion ministry. However, the model Jesus leaves is that the kingdom of heaven exists to bring order to chaos—to transform lives, spiritually and physically. This is the gospel in action.



The gospel according to Jesus attends to both the needs of the soul and the needs of the body.

Paul: Reworking Relationships

Outside of Jesus Christ, no one had more influence on the trajectory of Christianity in its formative years than the apostle Paul. Writer of close

A CROSS-SHAPED GOSPEL

to half the New Testament and planter of many churches, his fingerprints on the church can still be felt. Study the ministry of Paul and you find something curious. Whenever he comes to town he always asks two questions: (1) Where's the local synagogue? and (2) Where do the Gentiles hang out? He wanted to spend time with these two groups of people who wouldn't dare do life with one another. Paul would begin by preaching to the Jews, and then he would spend a lot of time preaching to Gentiles. If he's in Ephesus he goes to the lecture hall of Tyrannus to find the Gentiles (Acts 19:9), or in Athens he's at Mars Hill (Acts 17:22).

By going to both the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul eventually faced a challenge. Some Jews would convert to Christianity and so would some Gentiles. But now what? Does he start a church for the Jews on the north side of town and a separate church for the Gentiles on the south side? This makes sense, especially when you consider that the social norms of the day meant that Jews and Gentiles just didn't mix—it was too messy, especially for the Jews and all their dietary and ceremonial standards. The easy and most efficient thing to do, most could argue, was to keep them segregated.

The last thing you would want to do is to push against the social norms, but Paul's understanding of the gospel wouldn't let him take the easy way out. So, making an extreme break with the cultural customs of the day, Paul put these new Jewish and Gentile converts to Christianity in one church and challenged them to do life together and to love one another.

There were some obstacles along the way. Like when a Gentile family would invite a Jewish family over to their house for dinner, and the sheer horror on the Jewish family's face when a half a rack of ribs was placed on their plates. Paul deals with this in places like Romans 14. Or, what does one do when a group of Jews start making Gentiles feel bad for not being circumcised? Paul would have to double back and address this culturally messy issue in the book of Galatians. Paul would be the first to tell you that there are a lot of headaches when you start pushing against the social and cultural norms. But he would also say that it's worth it. Our new-found love for Jesus demands a reworking of relationships.

The Bible on Class Differences

Looking back on it, Korie and I both agree that our first date was *miserable*. I would say that part of the reason for the debacle was that she talked a whole lot. She'd answer, "Well, that's what happens when you're asked questions about yourself the whole time." The next time I took her out, I chose a place where she wouldn't talk so much. A place where I could quietly adore her. We ended up at the movie theater.

It was spring of 1998, and I knew that the perfect movie to take her to was the James Cameron film *Titanic*. For over three hours we sat quietly and soaked in the love story of Jack and Rose, the most unlikely of couples. In an era where the social norms deeply divided the haves from the have-nots, Jack found his way out of third class to the dinner table with Rose in first class. At the end of the meal, Rose sneaks across the divide, down to a beer-soaked party in steerage where the romance between the vagabond Jack and the high society Rose blossoms. As their love grows, the two begin to push harder against the social norms of the day, longing to experience a new paradigm in their relationship. Jack goes to his death refusing to accept the fact that poor must stay with poor and rich with rich.

The movie and my time with Korie were special, but the message of class division should not be ignored. Some historians suggest that the sinking of the *Titanic* represented the end of the Edwardian age—a period marked by insurmountable class divisions. The Bible, however, and the ministry of Paul proclaimed the death of class, race, and gender divisions centuries before the *Titanic* ended up at the bottom of the Atlantic.

To the believers who lived in Galatia and to all who read his epistle, he wrote:

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are

A CROSS-SHAPED GOSPEL

Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26–29)

In his short letter to Philemon, Paul appealed to the wealthy slave owner to receive back his once fugitive slave as a “beloved brother” (verse 16). He instructed Gentile believers to recognize that Christ had “broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” so they could reconcile with their Jewish brothers (Ephesians 2:14).

Jews and Gentiles United by the Cross

Paul uses the term *Gentiles* a lot in his letters. When he does, he always uses the term in one of two ways: (1) spiritually, in describing people who don't know Jesus Christ; or (2) ethnically, to speak of non-Jews. In the Ephesians 2 passage (listed above), we see that he uses the term *Gentiles* ethnically, because he says in verse 11, “Gentiles in the flesh.” I bring this up because what follows in the Ephesians 1 passage is really insightful about how Paul understood the gospel and its impact in how we are to relate to one another.

As divided as Jews and Gentiles were in the ancient world, the Jews did allow the Gentiles to come and worship at the temple. One of the qualifications for Gentiles who wanted to worship the God of the Jews was that they did so in one specific area—the Court of the Gentiles. This was a section of the temple that not only was reserved for them but also divided them from the three other courts where Jews were allowed to go and worship. In fact, there were signs on the walls in the Court of the Gentiles that informed these Jewish sympathizers that if they ventured beyond the walls, they would be killed. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, a multiethnic church composed of Jews and Gentiles, uses temple wording. The phrase “dividing wall of hostility” was taken from the temple, and specifically the wall that separated the Gentiles from the other areas of the temple.

The bad news is that before Jesus Christ, the Gentiles were separated

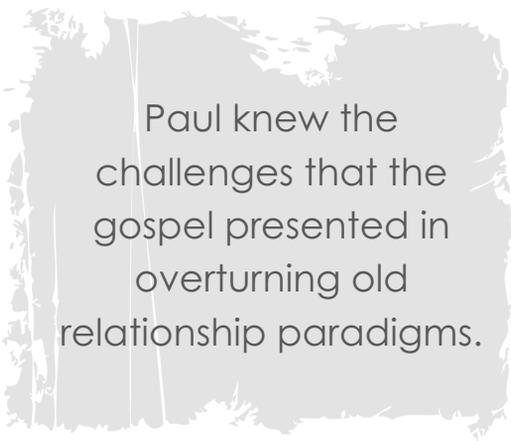
and alienated from “the commonwealth of Israel.” The good news, however, is that because of what Christ has accomplished on the cross, when He died in our place and for our sins, the dividing wall of hostility has been removed.

This, according to Paul, has profound relational implications, because now Jew and Gentile can worship together as one! Paul sees the gospel as providing *both* our reconciliation to God and our reconciliation to one another! To Paul, the gospel was both vertical and horizontal.

Dinner Tables and Unlikely Friends

When a couple gets married, there is at the same time a necessary re-patterning of relationships. The image that comes to mind is that of a dinner table, where the families of both sides have left their previous dinner tables to sit at one new table. The question now becomes, where do both sides sit? This is a great question for the bride, whose father once sat at the head of the table up until the point she said, “I do.” Now, because of the marriage covenant, the dad, though still very much a part of her life, must now change seats, allowing the husband to occupy this place. The same is true for the husband. While his mother may have sat opposite from the head of the table in a seat of authority for much of his life, Mama must now make some adjustments, if the new marriage is going to thrive. Fail to make these shifts at the “dinner table” of marriage, and you will have a lot of problems. The covenant of marriage demands a drastic new paradigm in how we approach relationships.

This is what Paul is getting at when talking about the covenant between a believer and Christ. Before we fell in love with Jesus, we were seated at the head of our own tables. For some, prior to Jesus, they may have lived naturally segregated lives, where the maxim “birds of a feather flock together” was true of them. But now, having entered the marriage covenant with Christ, they are seated at the multiethnic, multisocioeconomic dinner table of the church, where Christ is the new head. Now



Paul knew the challenges that the gospel presented in overturning old relationship paradigms.

they are told to do life with one another, to love one another, serve one another, and encourage one another. The covenant of salvation demands a radical re-patterning of relationships.

In Galatians 2, Paul rehearses a troubling scene. The apostle Peter used to do dinner with the Gentiles, which for a Jew was no small thing. Then

his Jewish buddies started to come around, and Peter retreated back into old relationship patterns by withdrawing from the Gentiles and hanging out with only the Jews. Paul, also a Jewish man, was ticked, to say the least, and he confronts Peter. In the heat of the conversation Paul lets it be known that Peter was “not living up to the truth of the Gospel” (2:14 AMP). For Peter to not walk in a new relationship by coming to the dinner table with his Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ was a gross failure to understand and apply the gospel.

Paul knew the challenges that the gospel presented in overturning old relationship paradigms and introducing new ones. Though Peter was considered the apostle to the Gentiles, motivated by the vision from God and a meeting with the Gentile centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), Paul would spend time with Gentiles as well. He brought his Gentile buddy Trophimus to Jerusalem, and a riot ensued after certain Jews falsely accused him of bringing Trophimus into the inner portion of the temple (Acts 21:27–32). Paul is arrested, and the rest of his life in the book of Acts is spent in the custody of others. Paul’s friendships with the Gentiles pushed against the social norms of his day.

My best friend growing up was black like me. Even though we shared the same race, we were as different as Colin Powell and Tupac Shakur. I was the Theo Huxtable to his Allen Iverson. He lived on a dead-end street

in the projects, while my street had a cul-de-sac. His dad was never around; my dad led us in prayer around the dinner table. He was on the reduced lunch plan at school and rode the bus. I drove to school and had my own bank account.

As different as we were, our friendship has lasted over thirty years. One of the main reasons for this is that my parents fought to make sure that we were always around each other. When my father wanted to take me to a ballgame, he got an extra ticket for my friend so he could come along. When my parents were concerned about my spiritual life and wanted to send me to some youth conference, they made sure my friend came too by paying his registration fee; they even gave him spending money.

By no stretch of the imagination are my parents wealthy, but they do represent the middle-class African-American demographic that began life in a lower class. In his book *Our Kind of People*, Lawrence Graham notes how, once out of the hood, the African-American middle to upper middle classes do not even think of reaching back to befriend, much less help those left behind. The gospel of Jesus Christ, however, compelled my parents to blow up old paradigms and to invite people of different classes to their dinner table.

Movie Messages

Think of the movies that you find most compelling, that move you, that even make you cry. For me, in most cases those movies involve people coming together and doing life who absolutely should not be at the dinner table together. It's me bawling my eyes out as I watch again *Schindler's List*, witnessing the kindness and compassion of a German man named Oskar Schindler toward abused Jews. Or it's that scene in *Remember the Titans*, when the white quarterback from California named Sunshine tries to knock down the segregated norms of the South by walking into a burger joint after a football game with some of his black friends. In both examples

A CROSS-SHAPED GOSPEL

can be found the treasure of the gospel. Before Oskar and Sunshine stepped across the divide, Jesus left heaven and came to earth. He sat at the dinner table with prostitutes and tax collectors. He pushed against social norms by sitting in public with a woman at the well. When society said lepers were to be out on the fringes of the community, He touched them. When a Gentile woman came begging for “crumbs” from the table, Jesus provided for her. Through it all, Jesus overturned the old dinner table and left us a new one, filled with rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, slave and free. Along the way, people were either in awe or wanted to kill Him, because to see Jesus and how He related to others was to see a completely new way. To some it was the way it shouldn't be, but to Jesus it was exactly the way it was supposed to be.

Life with Jesus is not only about a quiet time in the morning, with a Bible on your lap and a cup of coffee in your hand. As important as it is to study God's Word, the gospel must launch us out to question and push against the unbiblical social norms of our world in a redemptive way. Only then have we truly understood what it means to follow Jesus.