

The Gospel

What is the meaning of life?

'Have fun!' 'Take risks!' 'No regrets!' 'Relax!' 'Take it easy!' 'Be successful!' '42!'

It's one of those questions that's so big that we don't even know where to begin.

But here's the thing--I believe that I have discovered the real, authentic, fundamental, irresistible, glorious, true meaning of life!

Do you mind if I share it with you? It's not that I'm any cleverer than anyone else and somehow managed to work it out, but I have found that simply *"Through the gospel, through the message of Jesus Christ, the mystery which was kept secret since the world began has now been revealed!"* (Romans 16:25)

So what is this message? What is the simple gospel? What is the meaning of life? We sum it up with six simple colours: **GREEN**, **BLACK**, **RED**, WHITE, **YELLOW** & **BLUE**. We start with **GREEN**. Green represents **CREATION**.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" Genesis 1:1.

He created the hills and the seas, He created the grass and the trees, He created cactus and caterpillars, grasshoppers and geckos, parrots and pears.

And He didn't just create the beautiful green planet on which we live, but He stretched out the surrounding universe, and filled it with stars and planets, dusty asteroids, exploding supernovas, and showers of meteors.

He invented the rules that govern creation: the laws of gravity, electromagnetism, radioactive decay, quantum mechanics.

He precisely tuned the scientific constants of the physical universe so that life could grow and flourish.

And – most importantly! – He made you! He made me. He made humanity in His image. He made us to know Him. To share His life. To know His love.

The very fact that we can talk about 'MEANING' proves that we are more than just chemicals bouncing around a test-tube. And the God with whom the meaning of life begins is more than just a timeless truth or a creative cause.

We believe that God is Trinity – three persons, but one divinity. Which means before creation God wasn't bored and lonely, but a glorious dance of communication and community. We believe *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8).

Now some people say—'If God is love, then why is the world such an unlovely place?'

Death and disease and cancer and bullying and loneliness and rape and genocide...
Why? Why? Why?

Well the answer to that question is actually explained by the next colour: **BLACK. BLACK** represents **SIN**.

In the beginning God was in perfect relationship with humankind.

But He gave us a choice – the chance to show that we loved Him like He loves us. The chance to trust Him, and receive our meaning from Him, letting our lives be entwined into God's eternal love story.

But the devil deceived us, and we gave in to temptation. We did the one thing God had asked us not to do. We lusted after what was forbidden--we broke that relationship of perfect love.

God had said that '*In the day you disobey Me, you will die*' (Genesis 2:17) – but they didn't physically die. But spiritually they did die -- and their connection to God was shattered. And it wasn't long before physical death had also come into the world, "*as Cain murdered his brother*" (1 John 3:12).

Because as soon as we start making up our own meanings for life, and creating our own standards of good and evil from the world we find around us, rather than agreeing with God's one true holy and loving authority, then who's to say what's right and what's wrong?

Why shouldn't it be 'survival of the fittest'?

If there's no God, then why shouldn't I lie and cheat to get what I want? If no-one sees me do it, then why shouldn't I take my brother to a lonely field and kill him? (Gen. 4:8)

'If a tree falls in the jungle, and there's no-one there to hear it—does it make a sound?'

Now, most of us don't like the word 'sin'. Because our experience has been that other people have condemned us for breaking one of their rules, and have acted as if they themselves have never broken a rule. So even to say the word 'sin' makes us feel like we too are judgmental hypocrites.

But according to Jesus the whole law of God can be summarised in one word: **LOVE**. "*Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And love your neighbour as yourself.*" (Mark 12:30-31).

So sin by definition is simply anything that's not loving. And if we're honest with ourselves, we've all at some point in our lives, been unloving. (And if we're not honest—well, that's sin too!) The Scriptures say that *"All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God"*. (Romans 3:23).

Now remember, *"God is love"*. And obviously 'love' and 'not-love' are completely opposite. So by definition God and sin can't mix. It's like oil and water: if you try and stir them together, what happens? They separate! The water sinks to the bottom, the oil floats to the top.

Which is why even though a God of love made a good world, we now have to face the reality of EVIL.

But the story does not have to end with sin separating us from the presence of God!

RED represents **LOVE** – and the good news is that God's love is stronger than death! And even though sin damaged and destroyed our relationship with God, and our capacity to feel the full force of God's love, nevertheless the fact of God's love remains unchanged.

Now when we think of love, we sometimes think of a red rose— that beautiful symbol of blossoming romance!

But a rose quickly withers: its petals fade, and fall.

And too often that's our experience of love: a sudden rush to the head, but then the feelings fade.

But we could also say that **RED** represents **BLOOD**. For *"the greatest demonstration of love is for a person to lay down their life for a friend"* (Jn 15:13).

And so in that great Shakespearean romantic tragedy, Romeo and Juliet both die for each other.

And this is how *"God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

But unlike the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, the death of Jesus wasn't simply a dramatic gesture.

No—the death of Jesus was the necessary solution to the otherwise insurmountable obstacle that our sin had established between us and God.

You see, God isn't just a loving Father and our Creator – he's also a righteous Ruler and Judge, and as such He cannot merely turn a blind eye to sin: *"God is a righteous Judge, and God is angry every day"*. (Psalm 7:11)

If someone was to break a law: say, the speed limit, then they would get a speeding ticket. And they would either have to pay the penalty, or else they would be punished.

We are in God's world, and we have all broken His law. And so we are all faced with the duty to pay the penalty we owe—or otherwise face punishment.

The problem is that the Scriptures say that *"No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them-- for the redemption of a soul is costly, no payment is ever enough, that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption."* (Psalm 49:7-10)

So it seems that we are faced with an unsolvable paradox: *"God is gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin-- but by no means can He clear the guilty!"* (Exodus 34:6-7)

How can this be? How can God forgive us – if He is unable to acquit the guilty?

"What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark 8:37.

The Psalmist didn't quite know the answer, but as he meditated on this question, he declared with prophetic faith: *"God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me!"* (Ps. 49:15).

And this is exactly what happened. *God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* John 3:16. *For what the law could not do, God did, by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled.* Rom. 8:3 *"Because we are human beings, made of flesh and blood, the Son of God also became flesh & blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death."* (Hebrews 2:14)

And that brings us to the other difference between the death of Jesus and that of Romeo and Juliet: which is that while their deaths were a tragic and final end to their young lives, the death of Jesus was not the end!

The gospel says not only that Jesus died for our sins—but that on the third day He rose again! *"God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."* Acts 2:24

Which brings us to WHITE, which represents NEW LIFE and FORGIVENESS.

Jesus didn't just die for us, but His RESURRECTION means that He can now be with us always.

Through Jesus, we too can receive that resurrection life, and be given a new heart and a clean start.

"This is the covenant that I will make, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people... For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." Jeremiah 31:33-34

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" Ezekiel 36:26.

This is what Jesus was talking about when He said: *"You must be born again"* (John 3:7).

All we need to do to experience complete forgiveness and be reconciled to God, is to confess that we are sinners and trust in Jesus.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9) *"and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:7).

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

"Whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" John 3:16

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away— behold all things have become new!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

It's so simple! And yet so profound! Is there any reason why you wouldn't want to receive this?

But some people respond by saying—'Well, it's all very well for you, but I'm just not sure it's for me.'

Which brings us to **YELLOW**, which represents the golden gates and the glory of **HEAVEN**.

And the reality here that we have to face is that one day all of our lives are going to come to an end.

It's the ultimate statistic: everybody dies.

And the question everyone needs to ask themselves is this— Do you know what will happen to you when you die?

Because unfortunately we can't speak about heaven without also being reminded of hell.

Jesus came preaching the gospel and declaring that the kingdom of heaven was at hand – but he also spoke more than anybody else about the dangers of hell.

Some say, 'I think that's the end. I'll be buried and that's it.'

But the Bible says *"it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment"* Heb. 9:27.

Some say, 'It's impossible for anyone to know what happens after death'.

And Jesus almost agrees: *'No-one has gone up into heaven – except the one who came down out of heaven!'* John 3:13.

I don't claim to know what happens after death because I'm any cleverer than anyone else— but we have to come to terms with the historical fact of Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth. His teaching—which two thousand years later still speaks with the power of divine truth. His ministry—a catalogue of miracles and healings, so unprecedented that even secular scholars do not dispute it. His discipleship—he trained twelve poor and ordinary men to start a movement that today has impacted every single nation of the world. But in particular, His death, and His resurrection – because whatever your opinions about the nature and possibility of life after death, it cannot be denied that his followers were convinced that the man they had seen nailed to a cross and crucified was then resurrected three days later.

So—'do you know what will happen to you after you die?'

Some say, 'I hope I'll go to heaven...' But we have to ask what that hope is based on.

Often we think that although God might punish other people for certain particularly wicked sins-- Hitler, Stalin; rapists, child abusers; – we think that hopefully we have done enough to somehow earn a place in heaven.

'I haven't done anything that bad, have I?'

But the Bible says, *"there is none righteous, no not one"* Romans 3:10. *"And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags"* Isaiah 64:6.

Every other religion says that if you do this and this and this, then perhaps you can earn salvation, but Jesus said *"you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect"* Matthew 5:48.

But none of us is perfect! If life is a multiple choice test and the pass-mark is 100%, we've already got the first question wrong! We've already failed the test!

So if we're trusting in our own record, then we have no chance of heaven!

But the good news is, that because of Jesus' death on the cross, if we trust in Him, we will be *"born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."* 1 Peter 1:3-4

And the amazing thing isn't just that we can go to heaven when we die, but that the moment we trust in Jesus, *"behold! The kingdom of heaven is within you"* Luke 17:21.

Which brings us to the final colour, **BLUE**, which represents the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

We use the colour blue, because Jesus described the Spirit as being like water, *"living water"* (John 7:38-39), that refreshes not just our physical bodies but our inner being. Jesus promises that *"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst"*. John 4:14.

Our lives are like an empty glass: we're looking for meaning, we're looking for purpose, we're looking for something that will satisfy our souls.

"God has set eternity in the human heart—yet no-one can fathom it!" Ecclesiastes 3:11.

We can try and fill up that void with all sorts of things: with money and power; fame and fortune; sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll; but you only have to read the celebrity gossip magazines to realize that this never really satisfies!

And even good things – friends, family, meaningful work -- if you try and find your identity in those things, then you will inevitably be disappointed.

But Jesus offers us *"the promise of the Father"* (Acts 1:4)-- the indwelling, overflowing, soul-satisfying presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

And when you receive the Holy Spirit you are given assurance of eternal life, because *"the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God"* Romans 8:16. Through the Spirit *"the love of God is poured out into our hearts"* Romans 5:5.

And this, I believe, is the meaning of life. I could tell you my own story of how I have discovered it to be true. But it's not just true for me—this is a gift for you, too.

Is there any reason why you wouldn't want to receive this gift?

If so, I'd love to talk through whatever questions you might have.

But if you are ready to receive this, then you can ask God to receive this gift right now.

If you're not sure what to say, then this simple prayer might help:

Father God, I want to live a life that is meaningful! I want to receive this gift of eternal, abundant life!

Thank-you that your mercy overcomes judgement. Thank-you that Jesus came and died for my sin. Thank-you that your love is stronger than death. Thank-you that Jesus rose from the dead.

I confess that I have sinned. I've done things I shouldn't have done. I repent! I turn away from sin. And I turn to Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.

I ask that you would fill me with your Holy Spirit. Please fill me with your love, your joy, your peace. Please send me out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.

No-one can sincerely say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.12:3).

So if you've prayed this prayer (or something like it),

then you've been spiritually born again into God's Covenant Family!

If you've never been baptized before then we would love to baptize you,

as a physical demonstration that you are beginning a new life as a disciple of Jesus.

And we would love for you to join us in our journey

of discovering how to fulfil God's purposes in our generation.