

THE GOSPEL, APOLOGETICS, AND WORLDVIEW: A CORRELATION AND CHALLENGES IN MYANMAR

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Abstract

This paper argues that the gospel is far more profound and richer than a mere guarantee of going to heaven when a person dies. Instead, the gospel is a story that reached a climax when Jesus Christ became human. Understanding the gospel in this biblical narrative unveils that the ultimate hope of the Christian faith is not heaven; rather, it is a new Jerusalem or new heaven and new earth where God will dwell among us. In Myanmar, presenting this gospel always triggers off a worldview clash because of radical differences between Buddhist and Christian worldviews. However, this paper points out that God does not leave humanity without a contextual link since human beings (regardless of religious differences) are divine image-bearers.

Keywords: The gospel, apologetics, worldview, Buddhism, *dukkha*, un-satisfactoriness, Christianity, Myanmar.

Introduction

I would like to begin this essay with an encounter with a friend of mine. He was an evangelist, and we worked together in the same church. One day we were doing house-to-house evangelism. He presented the gospel in a way that I had never heard before. This was the gospel he shared with Burmese Buddhists: *God sent four persons through whom to save humankind. The first was Moses; the second, the Buddha; the third, Jesus; and finally, Muhammad. What made Jesus unique from the rest is that he conquered death (မစ္ဆာမာရ်) and sexual desire (ကိုလောသာမာရ်), which others did not. Therefore, Jesus is truly God, who became human to save us.*¹

The question is, “Is this way of presenting the gospel acceptable, or is it questionable?” My argument here is not to say “yes” or “no.” The Bible does not say that the Buddha and Muhammad were the ones whom God sent into the world.

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¹ In fact, my friend’s gospel presentation is based on the Burmese Buddhist idea of “five evils” (မာရ်ငါးပါး). Death is one of the five evils to be defeated to demonstrate godhood.

Not was Moses the one God sent, though he was chosen by God to deliver the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised land.

However, my friend's way of communicating the Gospel to Burmese Buddhists raised two initial questions. First, what is the gospel? Second, what does it mean to defend the Christian faith? A third question arises from the first two, how are these two related? This paper examines the gospel through the whole biblical narrative and how the gospel itself has an apologetic nature. It then explores what challenges we might encounter when the gospel is presented to Buddhists in Myanmar.

Apologetics and the Gospel

What does apologetics mean? The term *apologetics* is derived from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “defense” or “reply to a formal charge such as Socrates’ apology.”² We can find the word in both noun and verb forms eight times in the New Testament. The best descriptive passage in the Bible is 1 Peter 3:15 – *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer (apologia) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*³ In short, apologetics is a rational defense of the Christian faith based on the biblical worldview. A key argument is that the Christian faith is not irrational or anti-intellectual. Instead, apologists (those who defend the Christian faith) seek to argue that Christians have a reason for faith. Well-known Christian apologists William Lane Craig and Steven B. Cowan present two types of apologetics – offensive (or positive) and defensive (or negative) apologetics. The former seeks to give a positive case for Christian truth claims, while the latter aims to nullify objections to those claims.⁴ In general, Christian apologetics entails the giving of the reasons for faith. The approach employed in this paper is positive or offensive apologetics because what the gospel offers is the message of Jesus Christ about a new life based on the worldview of the whole Bible. So what is the gospel?

² Robert L. Reymond, *Faith's Reasons for Believing: An Apologetic Antidote to Mindless Christianity* (Ross-shire: Mentor Imprint, 2008), 18.

³ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 1 Pe 3:15.

⁴ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, third edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 23-24; Stephen B. Cowan, general editor, *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 8.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the central tenet of Christianity. When its message is lost, Christianity becomes lifeless. During the late Medieval Period, the gospel was eclipsed by religious ceremonies and rituals overtook it. But God raised the Reformers like John Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli, who recovered the essential meaning of the gospel. So we see the Five Solae of the Protestant Reformation – by Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone, Christ alone, and glory to God alone. Justification by faith alone renewed the Church, which had sunk into the ocean of “salvation by works.”

What do we mean by the gospel? Is it possible for Christians to give a comprehensive and satisfactory definition of the gospel? Starting from the Lausanne Movement in 1974, shows that evangelicals across the globe came to realize the importance of understanding the whole gospel, thus claiming the *whole* gospel for the *whole* world. At the Second Lausanne Congress, Manila, 1989, an African theologian Tokunboh Adeyemo defined the gospel as “the triumph of good over evil; of cosmos over chaos; of light over darkness; of life over death; of sight over blindness; of justice over corruption; of Christ over anti-Christ; of God over god-substitutes; and of the Kingdom of God over the kingdoms of this world.”⁵ Truly this understanding of the gospel is wholistic.

Similarly, the late John Stott claimed that to preach the gospel is to preach Christ, for Christ is the gospel. The Christ is Lord – the Lord from heaven, exalted at the Father’s right hand, to whom all owe allegiance. At the same time, this Christ is the crucified Savior, who was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.⁶ While Stott’s vision is Christocentric, Adeyemo’s understanding is wholistic. The first Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization comprehensively covers the meaning of the gospel:

The *evangel* is God’s Good News in Jesus Christ; it is Good News of the reign he proclaimed and embodies; of God’s mission of love to

⁵ Alan Nichols (editor), *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World: Story of Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization, Manila 1989* (Charlotte, NC: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization & Regal Books, 1989), 73.

⁶ John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Five New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1961), 26.

restore the world to wholeness through the Cross of Christ and him alone; of his victory over the demonic powers of destruction and death; of his Lordship over the entire universe; it is Good News of a new creation of a new humanity, a new birth through him by his life-giving Spirit; of the gifts of the messianic reign contained in Jesus and mediated through him by his Spirit; of the charismatic community empowered to embody his reign of shalom here and now before the whole creation and make his Good News seen and known. It is Good News of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global, and cosmic. Jesus is Lord! Alleluia! Let the earth hear his voice!⁷

This description truly reflects the breadth and depth of the gospel. The Reformation paradigm of creation; fall, redemption; and restoration is also helpful. These four categories are a basic frame or worldview through which we see and interpret who we are, why we are here, and what is fundamentally wrong in this world. Understanding the gospel in light of the whole biblical narrative, we see that it is not a set of beliefs or doctrine; instead, it is fundamentally the story in which Jesus Christ is the restorer of all brokenness that came into existence through Adam. To illustrate my point, God made a good world, including humankind. But human beings failed God. That fall broke every relationship – the relationship between God and humanity and the relationship between human beings and creation. Jesus Christ became flesh to restore all brokenness. When a person receives Jesus Christ as his/her Savior and Lord, that person, through the work of the Holy Spirit, has begun to experience the restoration that Jesus brought. Of course, the restoration is not yet fully experienced in a believer's life. Only when Christ returns shall full or complete restoration be realized. This full restoration covers everything including humankind, creation, principalities and powers. The Apostle Paul clearly says this in Colossians 1:19-20 (NIV84): *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him (Jesus Christ) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* In this sense, the gospel is the good news about what Jesus Christ did for humankind.

⁷ J. D. Douglas (ed.), "Theology and Implications of Radical Discipleship," from *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1294.

Here we see how the role of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a powerful historical tenet of the Christian faith. Martin Luther's breakthrough of justification by faith alone is hugely important in articulating the gospel's message. "Justification" is, in fact, a juridical term. We need to locate ourselves as convicts in the court where God is the Judge and Jesus Christ is the Mediator. This necessitates a narrative of the whole biblical drama – why and how we become convicts before God, what is fundamentally wrong in us, why, and how Christ's death can justify us.

The Bible also uses other images for the salvation that God has achieved through His Son, Christ Jesus – such as redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. We were captives of the power of darkness, so Christ came in to redeem us or buy us out from it. Reconciliation highlights that the enmity between God and humankind. Christ, therefore, came to an end that animosity through his death and reconcile with God. The image of propitiation indicates God's wrath at human wickedness being appeased by Christ's death.⁸ We need to be sanctified before we can be in relationship with the holy God. These images cannot be comprehended fully unless we see them in light of the whole biblical drama.

Seeing the gospel in light of the whole story of the Bible, we can assert that Christianity is more than a religion. It is about relationship with a person, namely Jesus Christ who was incarnated, was crucified, rose again after three days, and will come again to bring in the full realization of the Kingdom of God. Everything he did was to save us from sin and the power of darkness to a new creation which was spoiled by sin and fallen into the power of darkness. The gospel, according to the Bible, is fundamentally a story, not a set of doctrines, dogma, or beliefs. All who receive Jesus Christ are part of the story. As noted, this is the objective reality of the gospel, which becomes the power of God in someone when they subjectively believe it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ The idea of propitiation is obnoxious to many people both in the West and the East. To them, the concept of a wrathful God who was appeased by the death of his Son, Jesus Christ is seen as cosmic child abuse. The late John Stott, in his book *The Cross of Christ* rightly argues what kind of propitiation the Bible talks about and why it is essential in the doctrine of salvation see, 168-175.

To my surprise, many Christians in Myanmar today view that the gospel merely as an assurance of salvation after death.⁹ Of course, this understanding of the gospel is not entirely wrong, yet it is only a very partial expression of the gospel. The gospel is much broader and far more profound than an assurance of salvation after death. The salvation that Jesus worked out and the reign of God he brought in encompass everything – humanity, creation, and the whole cosmos. We are redeemed from all the sins we commit and from the power of darkness (or principalities and powers). Not only are we redeemed *from* these, but we are also redeemed *to* the new life to live under the kingdom or reign of God with the help of the Spirit who dwells in every believer.

We have an assurance for life after death and we also have the power of God within us through the Spirit. Thus, Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jews first and also to the Greek,” (Romans 1:16). Here we see that the gospel itself is the divine power, and this power has begun to work out within all those who believe so that our lives are being transformed into Christlikeness. A genuine born-again Christian has not only an assurance of God’s salvation for life-after-death but also the transforming power of God within us for growth.

What is more, the gospel breaks down all racial, social, and cultural barriers. In Rom. 1:16b, we read this – “*to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*” In the gospel, every human being, irrespective of religious, social, cultural, and racial differences, is equal. There is no room for racial, cultural, social, or even moral superiority because the gospel levels all those differences. What Apostle Paul said in Gal. 3:28, “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*”¹⁰ makes crystal clear the power of the gospel in breaking down racial and cultural divisions.

⁹ In his book, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion*, N T Wright devoutly argues that the Christian ultimate goal is not “heaven,” but a renewed human vocation within God’s renewed creation.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ga 3:28.

There is also a crucial practical implication we can gain through the gospel. The fact that God became flesh shows that God values our physical body, which is the opposite of the dominant view of Burmese Buddhists who see the human body as an animate physique, being subject to decay while living (in Burmese, *aput kaun*, *ayut saung*, အပုပ်ကောင်၊ အရှုပ်ဆောင်). The Bible is explicit that God himself “formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). The word “being” translates the Hebrew word *nepesh*, which, though often translated by the English word “soul,” ought not to be interpreted in a sense suggested by Hellenistic thought.¹¹ In ancient Greek, the human being is understood as having separate parts, such as soul or spirit and body, mind and emotion, and so on. In seeking to understand the unity of personhood, the Christian psychologist David Benner argues that it is not just one part of our being that longs for God; it is our total being that yearns for Him.¹² Glen Whitlock observes that the Hebrew word for the nature of man as a creature is *basar*, which is usually translated as “flesh,” not in the sense that the Greek *soma* is used. The word “flesh” is used to refer to the man as the living creature in general.¹³ So Whitlock highlights,

The human person is a totality. It is not the body or the mind which acts, but it is the total person. It is the total “I” who confronts God ... The “I” cannot escape the reality of this confrontation by saying, “My body has seduced my mind” ... evil resides in the total person. It is the whole man who sins.¹⁴

In reading Psalms, we also see some verses where the Psalmists express their longing for God not just through their soul or spirit but also through their body or flesh.¹⁵ Therefore, the Christian view of our physical body, unlike that of Burmese Buddhists, is holistic because Jesus Christ does not just save our soul or spirit, but

¹¹ *New Dictionary of Theology*, Sinclair B. Ferguson & David F. Wright (eds.) s.v. “Anthropology,” (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 28.

¹² David G. Benner, *Care of Souls: Revisioning Christian Nurture and Counsel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 62.

¹³ Glenn E. Whitlock, “The Structure of Personality in Hebrew Psychology: The Implications of the Hebrew View of Man for Psychology of Religion,” *Interpretations* (January 1960): 3-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁵ For instances, Ps. 63:1b says, *my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you*; 84:2, *My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

our whole being. We will fully realize the salvation of God when Christ returns. The apostle Paul plainly says in 1 Cor. 15: 51-54,

Listen, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Our present perishable body will be transformed into an imperishable and immortal one. Therefore, God’s creation of humankind, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the final resurrection of our body in Christ’s return gives us a full affirmation of the importance of our physical body. That itself demonstrates the apologetic character of the gospel, which sees the holistic nature of human personality.

Understanding the whole gospel in light of the biblical drama is crucial role in communicating it to others. Today, we often hear the terms a “five or seven minutes” gospel presentation, “evangelism explosion,” and “four spiritual laws.” In Myanmar, gospel tracts, such as *Lubawa Thattan* (Human lifespan), are widely used in presenting the gospel. We used to begin with the question in presenting the gospel, “Where will you go when you die?” Of course, there is nothing wrong with those approaches. When we happen to meet someone on the train, street, or bus, we do not have enough time to share the gospel with that person. Within a short time, we try our best to share the gospel by using those methods. So, what problems do we face when we present the gospel so briefly with people who have an entirely different worldview?

Presenting the Gospel in the Context of Myanmar

The worldview clash has become problematic when we present the gospel without the backdrop of the whole biblical drama to the people who have a radically different story – in this case, Buddhists in Myanmar. Since there are massive differences between Buddhism and Christianity, it is impossible to cover them in detail in this essay but I will take two key concepts of Buddhism,

which are entirely different from Christianity, to present two contrasting worldviews. This compare-and-contrast does not praise Christianity over Buddhism, nor vice versa. Its purpose is to stress the differences between Christianity and Buddhism so that the worldview that the gospel offers may be made clear.

The first word that I like to explore is the concept of Nibbāna (*nirvana* in Sanskrit), which is the highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations.¹⁶ Nibbāna means extinction, “extinction of life-affirming will manifest as greed, hate, and delusion, and convulsively clinging to existence; and therewith also the ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirth, old age, disease, and death, from all suffering and misery.”¹⁷ The question is how to attain this Nibbāna – before we die in this life or after death. Once the Buddha said, at the death of the Arahāt (the noble one who gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved nibbāna),¹⁸

This, O monks, truly is the peace, this is the highest, namely the end of all formations, the forsaking of every substratum of rebirth, the fading away of craving, detachment, extinction, Nibbāna.¹⁹

While nibbāna is something that can be attained afterlife, it is also something that can be achieved in this life. For this, the Buddha said,

If lust, anger, and delusion are given up, man aims neither at this own ruin, nor at the ruin of others, nor at the ruin of both, and he experiences no mental pain and grief. Thus is nibbāna visible in this life, immediate, inviting, attractive, and comprehensible to the wise.²⁰

In contrast, the ultimate goal of Christianity is, not as the Buddha taught, not extinction; it is a new heaven and new earth – a physical place where God will dwell

¹⁶ Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 4th Revised Edition (Kandy/Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), 201.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Arhat,” accessed 25 February 2020 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/arhat>. The literal meaning of the word “Arhat” in Sanskrit is “one who is worthy.”

¹⁹ Ibid., 202.

²⁰ Ibid.

among us. The book of Revelation pictures this, “*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*”²¹

To people whose ultimate aim is to attain the extinction of our desire, the idea of a new heaven and new earth would be very difficult to stomach. Sometimes, Christian evangelists compare the notion of nibbāna with the Christian concept of heaven. For Buddhists, the fundamental human predicament is not sin but *taṇha* (craving or desire). Presenting the gospel to Buddhists by comparing nibbāna with heaven does not do justice to the whole biblical drama. This shows that we need a kind of gospel presentation that seeks to be faithful to the gospel story and, at the same time, culturally accessible

The second term to explore is the idea of oneness. In Buddhism, the world is *one*, not *many*. Buddhism has some similarities with Hinduism. According to Harold Turner, there are only three possible ways of understanding the world: the atomic, the oceanic, and the relational. These are symbolized respectively by billiard balls, the ocean, and the net.²² The first sees reality in terms of its individual units. For this view, society is a conglomeration of individuals. This view is practiced in Western society. The oceanic view sees all things as ultimately merged into one entity. In this view, the world seems to be composed of various things, yet they all are essentially one. Every individual body is *Atma*, yet they are also *Brama* (mostly translated as Universal Spirit). In their usage, *Atma* is *Brahma*. In the third view, everything is constituted by relationships. Buddhism falls in the second view.

In contrast to the idea of oneness, the Christian worldview sees the material world and the God who created it separately. The material world is real and good because God made it. Only after sin came in was everything broken. The gospel tells us that Jesus Christ became flesh because he valued and cared for the world and our whole

²¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Re 21:3–4.

²² Cited from Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI & Geneva: Eerdmans & WCC Publications, 1991, 171-172.

being. He brought the reign or kingdom of God so that we can begin to experience its reality from the time we receive him and will fully experience it when he returns. When sharing the gospel with the people who see everything as one, it is not easy to present the gospel within a short limit of time. Even those who convert from Buddhism still need time to be discipled.

Therefore, sharing the gospel with Buddhists in Myanmar is a great challenge. To handle the challenge properly, we study contextualization – how to present the gospel to Buddhists in a culturally accessible way. However, it is important to remember that the gospel itself has a worldview and if the gospel is forced to fit into the other worldview in order to be accessible, the gospel will definitely be diluted. For this, D A Carson introduces the idea of worldview evangelism by exploring Paul’s sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17:16-34.²³ Carson argues that to share the gospel with people whose worldview is fundamentally different, we need to start farther back because the gospel is incoherent unless specific structures are already in place. He insists that we cannot

make heads or tails of the real Jesus unless you have categories for the personal/transcendent God of the Bible; the nature of human beings made in the image of God; the sheer odium of rebellion against him; the curse that our rebellion has attracted; the spiritual, personal, familial, and social effects of our transgression; the nature of salvation; the holiness and wrath and love of God.²⁴

What the gospel offers is a story in which Jesus Christ is the climax.

Though the gospel offers a different worldview from Buddhism, God does not leave us without any shred of evidence. Put it simply, and the gospel is news that can make sense to any person irrespective of whatever worldview they embrace. When Paul preached to the Athenians he quoted a Greek poet, *For in him, we live and move and have our being.*’ *As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his*

²³ D. A. Carson, “Worldview Evangelism – the Foundation of Preaching to Postmodern,” from <https://www.monergism.com/worldview-evangelism-foundation-preaching-postmoderns> (accessed 24 February 2020). This is adapted from the chapter, “Athens Revisited” from *Telling the Truth*, edited by D A Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 384-397.

²⁴ Ibid.

offspring.²⁵ Further, he also used the phrase *To the Unknown God*, which he found on an altar inscription to begin the gospel presentation. In each culture, we can find a clue from which we can begin to share the gospel. Here we see the vital role of contextualization in presenting the gospel.

If the worldviews of Buddhism and Christianity are radically different, is there any culturally accessible way for Buddhists to present the gospel? What would constitute Paul's *To the Unknown God* in Buddhism so that Buddhists might also see the reality of the gospel even within the frame of their worldview? As the apostle Paul said, "*For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them*, Rom. 1:19." God does not leave us without witness or clue through which we can have a sense of Him. In Buddhism, that clue is, in my understanding, the idea of *dukkha*, which English-speaking people mostly translate as suffering, pain, sorrow, or misery. The word *dukkha* is far more profound than those English words. It also includes the ideas of imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, unquenchable desire, un-satisfactoriness, and insubstantiality.²⁶ Gautama Buddha's desperate search for truth can be seen in his biographies. Though he was the prince and a king-to-be, he forsook everything and began the journey to find the truth. Before he attained Enlightenment, he practiced various kinds of meditation for six years. He practiced exceptionally severe asceticism until he was physically so weak that he fainted. That depicts the Buddha's desperate and dying search for the truth.

Here the argument I want to cast is not the nature of Siddhartha's Enlightenment, but his desperate and ardent search to quench his un-satisfactoriness or desire. He was desperate because nothing – his luxuries, nor the kingship he was to receive could satisfy him or fill his emptiness. So he left everything. After the Enlightenment, he taught the Four Noble Truths, the first and foremost of which defines human life as full of *dukkha*. In other words, life is full of imperfection, un-satisfactoriness, and emptiness. The Buddha deeply understood and experienced himself that life is empty, and nothing in this world can satisfy us, which God alone can satisfy. The

²⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ac 17:28.

²⁶ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974), 17. Despite the fact that Rahula mentions the vast meaning of the word *dukkha*, he leaves it untranslated lest he gives an inadequate and wrong idea of it, p. 17.

Bible teaches that “God has also set eternity in the hearts of men (Ecc. 3:11).” In other words, all humans, regardless of racial and cultural differences, have that longingness, emptiness, the sense of everything being unsatisfactory because God has set it in the human heart.

Gautama had an intense longing, which nothing in his world (kingship, luxuries, sex) could sate. The way he tackled that longingness was through the means of the meditation, which he called “the Eightfold Noble Path.” For the Buddha, this inherent desire or *tahna* (တောဂ္ဂ) itself is the fundamental human predicament which has to be overcome. In contrast, the Bible teaches that this desire, longingness, emptiness, or un-satisfactoriness is something that echoes the divine image within us. The Bible points out that this desire can never be sated by anyone or anything in this world but by Jesus Christ alone. C. S. Lewis puts it this way –

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing...²⁷

That is why the gospel that Jesus offers is pictured as the living water and the bread of life. These two pictures highlight that human un-satisfactoriness and emptiness cannot be met by anyone or anything in this world except by Christ Jesus alone. The gospel is, in this sense, culturally accessible even to Buddhist people whose worldview is radically different from the gospel worldview. This could be, in my understanding, a starting point for gospel presentation and dialogue. These are just two examples of the culturally accessible nature of the gospel, and there might be more. But suffice it to say that the gospel, albeit its worldview, is culturally accessible and relevant even to Buddhists in Myanmar.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, revised and amplified edition with a new introduction 1980 (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1980), 136-137.

Finally, what is important to consider is the role of the Holy Spirit who is, as Jesus said, the only one to “*convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in him; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the father ...* John 16:8-10.” Similarly, the apostle Paul states, ... “*no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit,”* (1 Cor. 12:3). We, as the proclaimers of the gospel, can make every endeavor to explain the gospel to those with whom we share the gospel by using a variety of methods, and illustrations. However, the experience of the new birth is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. Unlike other religions, we cannot make ourselves be a Christian by observing Christian traditions and rituals. What makes a person genuinely Christian is the supernatural act of the Spirit, who alone can open our heart to understand, repent, and believe the gospel. That *salvation belongs to the Lord* in Jonah 2:9 is true because the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..., Rom. 1:16.

Conclusion

We have now seen that the gospel is much more than how to get to heaven after we die. It is essentially a story with a solid worldview. Understanding and presenting the gospel with a storyline is apologetic in itself. Defending our faith is an essential task for all Christians through all the centuries. We need such apologists who defend our faith in an intellectually convincing and culturally accessible manner. However, we should not neglect to comprehend the gospel from the whole biblical narrative. If the gospel is a story, all who receive the gospel take part in that story. The ultimate hope we have is, as noted, the complete restoration of every brokenness. Since the gospel is a story with a solid worldview, we always face challenges in presenting it to people who have a radically different worldview. Despite those challenges, God does not leave us without a way in a contextual overlap. Since all humans are God’s image-bearers, there is/are hint(s) or clue(s) through which the gospel can be contextualized. For the Athenians, it was the inscription *To the Unknown God* through which the apostle Paul engaged culturally to proclaim the gospel. For Buddhists in Myanmar, it is the notion of *dukkha*, which the Buddha fundamentally defines as emptiness, un-satisfactoriness, and imperfection.