

**EXERCISING EVANGELISM: KNOW AND TELL THE GOSPEL****ALL ABOUT THE GOSPEL****Not more on evangelism!**

Having finished Philippians last week, today we embark on a new sermon series. But this, rather than being a series based on a book of the Bible, is a topical series. We are looking at a topic, rather than working our way through successive passages in a biblical book.

However, it will be biblical! While it won't be an exposition of passages, we will still be looking closely at the Bible to see what it has to say about our topic. Indeed we will be guided by the Bible in what to think about our topic.

What is our topic? It's evangelism ... again!! Some may well groan at that. After all, even though we haven't had a sermon series on evangelism, it's been a prominent subject for some time. Why do we need to do more on evangelism?

One reason is that we have our 'Exercising Evangelism Seminar' coming up in April now – we've had to put it back a few weeks – so it will be handy and helpful to dovetail our sermons into that.

However, that rather begs the question of why do evangelism AGAIN. Haven't we had enough? Let me give you four brief reasons:

1. Because evangelism seems hard and scary, (it needn't be) we tend to avoid it, or not do it well.
2. We do evangelism because we care about people and their relationship with God, and therefore their eternal destiny.
3. Evangelism is the duty of every Christian. God has commanded that we do it and so it is a matter of obedience. And that means evangelism needs to be a way of

life for us.

4. Without evangelism our church will not survive in the longer term. Through evangelism God grows his kingdom.

All of this is not to say that evangelism has not been happening amongst you. I give thanks to God it has, and give thanks to those who have been involved. But we can, and we need to do better (me included!).

### **Evangelism Fails**

Now to get you in the mood, to inspire you, let me tell you about an evangelism fail that involves me. (This is a reverse psychology trick – if I tell you how hopeless I am, then you will be emboldened, because you'll think, I couldn't be any worse than Mark, and look he's still standing).

It was very shortly after I'd left school – so that's going back 40 years now (actually 41!). Before I went off to uni to learn about surveying, becoming a surveyor, I worked with a surveyor on a the local council. The surveyor I worked with had just become a father for the first time, and, understandably, he was over the moon about it. As we were out on a job somewhere, we were discussing the meaning of life (as surveyors often do), and Al, the surveyor, said he reckoned our purpose in life was to have children. You can see why he said that. And straight away that set me thinking. Yeh, it must be great to have children (and it is), but is that our sole or main purpose in life; is that the meaning of life? To have children, who have children, who have children and on and on? Surely there's more to life than that?

Now, if I'd had a clear understanding of the gospel at that point (which I didn't), I could have steered the conversation in the direction of God and how meaning is found in him. But I didn't. Indeed I couldn't at that time, because I didn't know the gospel. I felt there was something to be said, but I had nothing to say. Fail!!

## **Excuses not to do evangelism**

An evangelism fail! We've all been there. And that leads me on to frequent excuses used not to do evangelism.

And the first one is that very often evangelism doesn't seem to work. If that is the case then the lack of return on the effort invested suggests that we'd better spend our time doing something else. Is that attitude justified? I trust that you will see, as we proceed, that it is worth the investment.

Another reason to avoid evangelism is that the Bible tells us (Eph 4.11) that only some are called to be evangelists. So if we do not have the gift of evangelism, then we don't have to be evangelists! Yippee! But that is misunderstanding the Bible.

Others have said that Jesus only told the disciples to go and make other disciples, since only the disciples and their contemporaries were witnesses of Jesus himself. Surely we can't witness to that which we haven't witnessed? So to make disciples is not a command to us. But yes, it is a command, because we are not witnessing to actually having laid eyes on Jesus. We are still witnesses.

And one more excuse: Doesn't the Bible tell us that God takes the initiative in calling people to himself? More, that God predestines or elects people to eternal life or eternal condemnation? If that is so, then surely we can leave it up to God to sort it out? He's capable. But trouble with that reasoning is that God has involved us in his plans to elect some and not others. We have a part to play too.

## **Credit to Chappo**

I should point out, because I haven't spelt it out yet, that this sermon series is going to follow the well-known book by John Chapman – Know and Tell the Gospel – as you can see from the screen. I am unashamedly borrowing ideas from Chappo's book, because

it's so useful. I don't think he'd mind. After all Chappo piggy-backed Rosie around when she was a kid!

### **What is evangelism?**

Before we go any further, we'd better define evangelism. And this is Chappo's definition (from KTG).

Evangelism is the process whereby a person tells other people the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with a view to persuading them to put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

### **What is the gospel?**

I'm not going to unpack that definition bit by bit, but there is one crucial element that we need to think about in some detail. And it's really our subject today. A subject I did not know enough about in my conversation with Al the surveyor. It's the gospel.

Because if we are telling people the gospel, it's handy, no essential, to know what the gospel is. So what exactly is the gospel?

To really find out what the gospel is, we need to study all of the Bible. We don't have time to study the whole Bible this morning, so we are going to look at just 5 vss – the first 5 vss of Romans from the passage that Suzanne read to us earlier, because they are a useful summary of the gospel. These vss are not the whole gospel, but nevertheless, most, but not all, of the essential parts of it. We will see what's missing, shortly.

### God's gospel

Please turn to Rom 1.1. It's also up on the screen.

*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God*

See the underlined bit. It is the gospel of God. It comes from God. It's God's gospel. He designed and brought it about.

Likewise, when Jesus began to preach, as we read in Mark:

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. (Mk 1.14)*

The good news of God. The good news being the gospel. The gospel of God. The gospel is God's gospel.

And it really is something of a relief that the gospel comes from God. That means we don't have to make it up. It's already been thought up for us. All we have to do is pass on the message. And if someone thinks the message is ridiculous, well, they can't blame us, because the message comes from God. It's his gospel, he's to blame. And that gives me some comfort. I might add, 'some' ...

But that is the crucial first point – the gospel is not ours, but God's!

Promised from the year dot

Scroll your eyes down to v2.

*the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures*

The gospel is not new. Obviously not new now. But not new to Paul either. The gospel predated Paul, and predated the earthly life of Jesus.

The gospel had been announced and promised through the OT and the prophets, long before. For instance, as Gal 3.8 tells us, the gospel was promised to Abraham back in Genesis, when God told him that all nations would be blessed through him. This gospel was further announced when Moses said God would raise up a prophet like him (Dt 18). More, when God told David that his kingdom would last forever, and when Isaiah pointed forward to the suffering of God's servant, the gospel was being announced.

So the gospel is not new – it had been promised by God from the year dot. What Paul

was preaching, the gospel, had a firm basis in history. It was not something thought up overnight.

And yet, in a way it was new to Paul and his contemporaries. What was new was that the OT prophecies, the scriptures, had been fulfilled, or filled out in Christ. The coming of Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, was new, although this coming had long been predicted.

However, in 2016, the gospel seems old hat to many. Partly this is because, in general, we like new things and novelty. After all, which would you prefer – an new house or an old tumbledown one? A reliable new car, or an old clapped-out bomb? A new computer, or something where you have to type in the DOS commands? I have a new electric toothbrush. Would I go back to an old one? No, because I can feel my teeth are cleaner with the new one – see!

So, to 21<sup>st</sup> century people, the very 'oldness' of the gospel can be a hindrance. We are into newness and fads. The latest gadget or fashion. Who wants to be a dog? Well, perhaps we should! Because we, of all people, should not assume new is better, or old, useless. Yes, western culture, esp materialist culture, does that. But our culture, Christian culture, is different. Our culture is the gospel, it's Christ. And that's the next subject.

The gospel is ALL about Jesus

V2 & 3:

*the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup>  
regarding his Son,*

Regarding his son. The gospel is about God's son, Jesus.

Seems an obvious point, but let me show you how, surprisingly, Jesus can be squeezed out of the gospel.

Often the gospel is touted as meeting every need we have. And indeed, it pretty much does. But, in expressing it this way, we have changed the focus of the gospel from Jesus, to ourselves.

The gospel is not about our needs – although that is a key element, no doubt. Rather, at its core, the gospel is about Jesus – it's 'regarding his Son'. And that means in the gospel we must focus on Jesus, and not on people's needs. We do not forget people's needs, but that is not the core of the gospel.

Similarly we must not get needlessly side-tracked with red herrings (although I'm sure red herrings can be quite tasty), like the same-sex marriage debate, or the origins of the universe and so on. Yes, talk about and discuss those issues – but in evangelism, don't let them distract you from the main subject, Jesus.

### The gospel is about a man

V3 again:

*regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David*

Jesus was, is, a descendant of David. It is crucial to realise that Jesus is a man! He is in, and of history. Mt and Lk, writing their biographies of Jesus, are careful to place him in history – Mt with his genealogy (which can seem tedious, but is important), and Lk with his historical setting for Jesus – *In the fifteenth year of Tiberias Caesar ...*

The gospel is rooted in history and verifiable events. No reputable historian doubts the existence of Jesus.

And because Jesus is historical, then he and the gospel are relevant. This stuff really happened! It is no figment of my, or anyone else's imagination. And that is a tremendous support, because the gospel does not depend on me, and on how I'm

feeling that day. It is not just a feeling I've got inside of me, which one day is here and the next is gone. It's real, it's historical.

And more, because Jesus is human, that means he has walked in my shoes. He has felt exactly what I've felt. And again that brings, connection and relevance.

As you know, I go cycling! I have some cycling shoes that used to belong to Bathurst TdF and Olympic gold medal cyclist, Mark Renshaw. And so I cycle in MR's shoes! Which means that when I see MR on telly in the TdF or whatever, I know he has the same-sized feet as me!

How is that relevant to the gospel? I'm not sure, but didn't I say something about having a deeper connection with Jesus because he has walked in our shoes? Because he is a real man of history?

The gospel is about the powerful son of God

But Jesus, a descendant of David, a man of history, was also, v4:

*declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead*

First things first here. '*Declared ... to be the Son of God.*' Astonishingly, Jesus is not only human, but also the Son of God. Again this is made clear in the Bible – at Jesus' baptism, the words come from heaven:

*This is my son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!*

And similar words come from God at Jesus' transfiguration:

*"This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."*

Throughout the NT it is clear that Jesus is to be regarded as divine. Yes he is a man. But he is also God.

But the ultimate proof of that divinity, of Jesus status as the Son of God, is as v4 tells us, by the resurrection.

This is the key truth, the key thing that distinguishes Jesus from all others – that he rose from the dead. And if Jesus rose from the dead, then he must be who he and the bible writers claim him to be – the Son of God.

But of course, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, says the apostle Paul, then forget about him! If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are more to be pitied than all people. Which of course means that everything, absolutely everything hangs on whether Jesus rose from the dead or not.

So what evidence do we have that he did so? Quite a lot really. I mean, I cannot get Jesus to walk into the room here and say 'Gudday'. But if we look at the evidence for Jesus resurrection, we will find that the balance of the evidence points strongly toward the resurrection – and there are numerous books written about this.

#### The gospel is about Jesus' death

Of course, if Jesus is resurrected, then he also must have died! And we know that death was on the cross. And that the reason for his death was on the cross was to bear our sins. And this is where this Rom 1.1-5, as a summary of the gospel, is not quite the whole gospel. Because it does not mention that Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins. And that, quite obviously, is crucial to the gospel. And it's important to understand that Jesus did not die on the cross to set us a good example of sacrifice. Instead he died to bear the punishment we deserve for our sins, for running our life our way, rather than God's way.

And the fact that these 5 vss of Rom do not cover all the gospel shows us how we need to consider the whole Bible, and cannot hang our understanding on a few vss.

#### Jesus Christ is Lord

Last, for today, the end of v4: '*Jesus Christ our Lord*'

Jesus is our Lord, our king, our master and ruler. At the end of Matt, 28.18, Jesus says

*All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me*

All authority belongs to Jesus'. He is the ruler of heaven and earth – everything. As Paul says Phil 2.9:

*God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.*

So, if Jesus has this authority, this exaltedness, then surely we should submit to him!

After all we submit to the boss at work, so should we not submit to the boss of bosses?

Jesus is Lord – that brings up another important point – that Jesus is not just a saviour, but Lord as well. But we might leave that to next week. Along with the other stuff I meant to cover this morning, but didn't

### **The essentials**

Nevertheless, we have covered the essentials of the gospel:

- It is God's gospel
- The gospel was promised by God from the year dot
- It's all about Jesus
- Jesus is a man
- Jesus is God's son
- Jesus was resurrected from the dead
- Jesus bore the penalty for our sins, and so
- Jesus is Lord

There is probably not much that is new in that lot for you. But keep that in context as we continue to learn how to Know and Tell the Gospel.