

Why Promote the Gospel? - Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] Just to let you know again what we're doing, over the next four weeks we're doing a sermon series entitled Promoting the Gospel. I've borrowed the title from a book written by John Dixon, who many of you will know, and he has many good things to say in that book, and so I commend it to you.

I don't agree with everything he says, however, but it's still got many good things nonetheless. And so that's what we're doing. We're looking at the why of promoting the gospel this week and next, and then the third and fourth week we're looking at the how of promoting the gospel.

But before we get into it, let me pray. So let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gospel. That is the good news about Jesus, his death and resurrection for us.

And Father, we pray that as we think about how and why we ought to promote and proclaim this gospel, that you might give us wisdom. As we look at your word, that you might give us understanding.

And as we reflect on it, that you might move in our hearts to live in light of it. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, some years ago, I played squash with my Bible study leader.

[1 : 1 3] He was and still is a barrister. But because of his job, he became quite unfit, to the point where his health insurance company would no longer insure him until he got fitter.

And so he asked me if I wanted to play squash with him so he could get fit. Now, I'd never really played squash before, but I thought, how hard can it be? He's unfit. So I thought, great, golden opportunity to beat him.

He often had a go at me in Bible study, so this was my time for payback. Now, we played squash every week for about a year, sometimes about five games each night because they were quick games.

So over 200 games in that year. And out of those 200 games, do you know how many I won? Two. He was 15 years older than me.

He was so unfit, he was about to lose his health insurance, and I could only beat him twice. It was demoralizing. It got to the point where Michelle actually stopped asking me if I had won the game that night and instead asked me how much I lost by that night.

[2 : 1 6] And so the following year when he said, oh, do you want to play again? I wasn't so keen. And I wonder whether this is similar when it comes to talking about Jesus with others.

You see, we can talk about Jesus time and time again, but often we're met with, you know, bizarre looks, sometimes even persecution, and often people are simply not interested.

And that's after you go through all the effort of praying for them, praying for opportunities, taking those opportunities, you know, plucking up the courage, your heart's pounding, you say something, and as soon as you mention the word church or Bible and or especially Jesus, the conversation stops.

I don't know if you've ever experienced that. For example, I remember visiting Michelle's grandparents some time ago in England, and I met Michelle's uncle for the first time. Now, at the time, I was studying at Bible college, and Michelle was looking after Tim.

And so her uncle asked me, you know, how it was going and how on earth we could afford to study with neither of us working full time. And so I answered him about how we coped financially, and I also mentioned that I was enjoying the study, and then I casually added, and what about you?

[3 : 26] Have you ever thought about church or God? Now, I thought I'd done pretty well at that point. You know, I'd answer these questions. I kind of worked in the conversation very naturally, just asked about God. I thought it was very smooth.

You know how he replied? He said, oh, I need to go to the toilet. And left. And he actually avoided me for most of our stay after that. You see, we don't always win, do we?

When it comes to sharing Jesus with others. When we try to talk about Jesus, or when we pray for people year after year who simply don't seem to get it or be interested in Jesus. And so like my squash playing days, it can be very demoralizing, to the point where next year we don't want to play anymore.

That is, next year we don't want to talk about Jesus as much anymore. In fact, I was speaking with someone from this church who said, they're just tired. They're too tired to talk to non-Christians about Jesus anymore.

And so why keep going? Why persevere? As I said, we're going to be looking at this question of why over the next two weeks. And today, it's not going to be a long sermon.

[4 : 29] I've got one main point, but I just want to ram it home. And to get us thinking about the why, though, I want you to start thinking yourselves. And in fact, I want you to turn to the person next to you in a moment, and I want you to talk about why we should promote the gospel.

Now that's the question. You've got 30 seconds. Why should you promote the gospel? Have a think about it. I know this, you know, crowd participation moment's not usual, but have a go. 30 seconds. Why promote the gospel?

Off you go. Thank you. Okay, that'll do.

Hopefully you got off the weekend and got onto the question. Now, I'm assuming you came up with all sorts of standard answers. Answers like, so that people will be saved.

Answers like, because we are to love others. Those sorts of things. But I wonder, without looking at the outline, which one you would say is the most fundamental?

[5 : 58] And given that some of you just did look at the outline, I wonder whether it's something we need to be reminded of anyway, so that we might keep talking about Jesus, keep doing what we can to promote the gospel.

And so what is this fundamental reason for promoting the gospel? Well, because God is God. Point one. And here we come to our Old Testament reading. So if you've got your Bibles, please open to Psalm 96 that Gary read for us earlier on.

It's page 479 in the Black Pew Bibles. Psalm 96, page 479. Now, this psalm is reasonably well known.

And verse 1 seems to be the psalmist's vision for the whole earth. He says, Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord all the earth.

As I said, this is a psalmist's vision, that the whole earth would sing to the Lord. And I take it that is why it's a new song, because it's not just Israel singing to the Lord, but the whole earth.

- [6 : 58] But how will this happen? Well, verse 2 and 3, I think the focus changes from the whole earth to Israel. Verse 2, Sing to the Lord, bless his name, tell of his salvation day to day, declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all peoples.
- He, as I said, the focus seems to change from the whole earth to Israel, for they are to declare his name among the nations, it says, verse 3. The interesting thing here is that the word for tell, in verse 2, or proclaim, is the same word for announce the good news.
- It's the same word for evangelize, if you like. You see, the Israelites were to evangelize, or to proclaim God's salvation day by day, declare his glory among the nations, so that the whole earth would sing to God.
- But why? Why should the whole earth sing to God? Well, verse 4 and 5, and here's our fundamental reason, verse 5, You see, the reason the Israelites were to proclaim God among the peoples is because God is God.
- And therefore he deserves to be praised, says verse 4. You know, he is greatly to be praised. And he is worthy of praise because he is the one true God who made the heavens, it says, and us for that matter.
- [8 : 37] The idols are nothing. They are worthless. In fact, the word for idol in Hebrew also means worthless. So verse 5 could actually be translated as, For all the gods of the peoples are worthless, but the Lord made the heavens.
- You see the difference? God is the true God. He is the one who made the heavens and us. And he is the true God of all people, whether they like it or not. And so we are to declare God to the nations so that they might treat God as God, because that is who he is.
- In fact, that's what the psalmist then tells the nations to do. In verses 7 to 9, he says, Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.
- Bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor. Tremble before him all the earth. It's as though the psalmist is saying, Hey, all you peoples of the earth, all you nations, make sure you give God what he deserves.
- Ascribe to him or say of him what is true and give glory due his name. Stop singing to your old idols and start singing a new song, a song to the true God, for that is who he is.
- [9 : 52] You see the logic? Because God is the true God, then the Israelites were to declare it as such within earshot of the nations so that they might treat God also as he deserves.
- I was driving with my family one afternoon and we pulled up to a set of traffic lights and then a police car pulled up beside us. And you always get a little bit nervous. You know you're doing the right thing, but you get a little bit nervous when the police pulls up next to you.
- Now the kids at that stage were not in a particularly good mood and one of them had recently been in the habit of poking her tongue out. And so when the police officer turned and waved at her, you can guess what she did, can't you?
- Now luckily she kind of looked cute when she did it and the police officer actually laughed. But we very quickly explained to our children that that's not how you treat police officers because of who they are.
- Now God is not a police officer, but he is the loving creator of all people. And so all people are to worship him as God, treat him rightly for who he is.
- [10 : 55] And we see this same logic when we come to Jesus. We're to promote the gospel of Jesus because of who he is, which brings us to point to in our second reading. So please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 28, which Dorothy read for us, page 811.

I forgot to mention that because this is a topical sermon series, we will be doing a bit of flicking through the Bible. And I won't necessarily be speaking on every verse, but just drawing out the big points.

So we come to Matthew 28. This chapter begins with the resurrection of Jesus, which we looked at last Sunday on Easter Sunday. And so in verses two to three, an angel of the Lord appears, rolls the stone away, and scares the guards stiff.

Presumably they then, well, we know they run back to the city at some point, but in the meantime, the women appear. And whether they notice the guards or not, we're not quite sure.

But the angel of the Lord does say to the women in verse five, do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has been raised.

[12 : 01] As he said, come see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples he has been raised from the dead. And indeed, he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him.

This is my message for you. And so they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy. And ran to tell his disciples. Here we saw these words last week when we looked at the resurrection in Mark's account, didn't we?

And it's interesting that Matthew also includes the fact that women left with fear, but also adds great joy. And Mark didn't add that great joy, if you remember. If you weren't here last week, Mark actually ends his gospel on a note of fear.

The women just left trembling and fearful. And I suggested this was likely for two reasons. First, the women knew their Old Testament, like Daniel chapter 12, where resurrection signaled judgment. You know, some rise to eternal life and others to eternal contempt.

And so because Jesus is raised, it signals judgment is just around the corner. But second, the women's fear is an appropriate response, I suggested, because that in the gospel of Mark, whenever people glimpse the divinity of Jesus, they respond with fear.

[13 : 16] And I gave you a number of examples. That is, whenever people see Jesus doing something extraordinary, something God-like, they are afraid. Now, why am I reminding you of all this? Well, because the resurrection we read about here signals that Jesus is both the King who will judge all people, and God, the Son, himself.

In other words, he is the Lord who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. And that's exactly what Jesus goes on to say. So if you flick over the page, we pick it up at verse 16.

Verse 16, Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, as the angel had told the women to remind them, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. See what he says there? Here the disciples meet Jesus before he ascends into heaven, and some of his Jewish disciples actually worship him.

Now this is an extraordinary moment, really, because all Jews were taught from birth that there is only one God. And so for some Jews to bow down and worship Jesus is essentially to call him God, even though I'm guessing they didn't quite work out how it all fitted together.

[14 : 35] Though some doubted, we're told. I love that little phrase, some doubted. It kind of reminds you that what we're reading here actually happened in history. I mean, if the disciples were making this up and wanted people to believe it, you really think they would have included the fact that some doubted?

Of course not. But the thing to notice here is that in verse 18, Jesus says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. And therefore, because he has all authority, because he is Lord of all, then he says in verse 19, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age. You see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying, Because I am the Lord of all nations, therefore make disciples of all nations, so that all people might worship him for who he is, the Lord.

You see, we are to promote the gospel so that everyone will treat Jesus as Lord because that is who he is. Same logic as Psalm 96. It's our son's birthday today actually.

He's eight years old. And because he's the birthday boy, he gets to choose what he wants for lunch. Previously he used to say things like fairy bread or something like that, which was nice because it was easy and cheap.

[16:00] Now he wants to go to a restaurant. I'm not sure he didn't do for his 10th birthday, but anyway. And so he's going to get some presents, we'll sing happy birthday, and we'll take him to the restaurant.

Now why will we do all this for him? Why will we treat him like this? Well because he's the birthday boy, that's who he is. Jesus of course is no birthday boy, but he's much more.

He's the loving Lord who died for all and was raised and given authority over all people in heaven and earth. He is the Lord of all people and therefore he should be treated as such by all people.

See the logic? We're to promote the gospel so that all people might treat him as he deserves. And to promote the gospel ultimately means to make disciples. That's the main command here in verse 19 in the original language.

And the command is not so much to go, baptise or teach. The main command is make. That's the imperative in the original language. And the way they are to make disciples however is by going, baptising and teaching and so on.

[17:02] Now going of course doesn't mean you have to go overseas, but it does imply an active stance, doesn't it? In the Old Testament you see Israel was mainly passive.

People often came to them. People like Rahab and Ruth or the Egyptians who came out of Egypt with Israel. They were to be a holy nation set apart for God and attract people to them.

But here there's a shift between the Old Testament and New Testament. We are to go. We are to be active. We are to go whether it's just to our neighbour. But we are to be at least actively looking for opportunities to try and make disciples.

And then we are to baptise, it says, which I actually think is a shorthand way of saying convert. If you were here at our AGM last year, I suggested then that I think baptism here refers not so much to water baptism, although that may come later, but rather to conversion.

That is being immersed into God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by becoming a Christian. And I think Andrew actually suggested something similar this year. I was very happy to hear. And there are a number of reasons for this.

[18:10] I like the fact that Paul seems not to care very much about baptism in 1 Corinthians 1. In fact, he says, I'm glad I did not baptise many of you, for I came to preach the gospel. 1 Corinthians 1. Also, it's by being converted that you are saved.

You know, by hearing the gospel and becoming a Christian that you are saved. Baptism does not save you. And so I suspect here, baptism is a shorthand way of saying convert. And so we had to go and convert by preaching the gospel, and then we had to teach them everything that Jesus has commanded us, including this command to go and make disciples and so on.

And Andrew picked that up earlier this year. This is what it means to promote the gospel though. There are other things we can do as well to promote the gospel and we'll consider those in the coming weeks. But it certainly means doing what we can to go baptise or convert and teach.

And so does that mean then we should all go after church this morning up to Shopping Town and start trying to convert people? Does it mean that? Well, keep coming back in the following weeks and we'll look at questions like that.

But however it works out for each of us in our daily life, the comforting thing to remember is the end of verse 20, isn't it? That Jesus who has all authority, this same Jesus, is with us to the very end of the age.

[19 : 25] And so we're not alone in this task of promoting the gospel and making disciples. But for today, all I want to do is remind you about this fundamental reason that we're to promote the gospel. And the reason is that there is only one true God and Lord of all people and so therefore all people are to worship him.

And they're only going to do that when they hear the gospel and are converted. See, it doesn't matter if you're here this morning and you don't believe in Jesus or not. He is the Lord over you either way.

And so whatever you are here doing this morning, even if you don't believe in Jesus, then we're to think about who he is.

So if you don't believe in Jesus, then the first thing we're to do to treat him as Lord is believe in him. Trust him to save you from judgment that will come. And if you already do believe in Jesus, as I know many of you do here this morning, then that's great.

But we're to continue living as him as Lord. You know, seeking to please him above ourselves. But also, which is the thing I've been trying to point out, living for him as our Lord also means trying to do all we can to see other people treat him as Lord.

[20 : 35] You see, we are to promote the gospel not just for the sake of the person who doesn't believe, but first and foremost, for Jesus' sake. That more people might honor him as they should, for he is Lord. And so if I see Michelle's uncle again, I could just smile and not bother looking for an opportunity to talk to him about Jesus again.

I don't want to send him to the toilet again. but I will look for an opportunity to talk, not just for his sake, but ultimately for Jesus' sake.

Because Jesus deserves to be honored by him and all people whether they realize it or not. For he is Lord. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gospel, for the good news about Jesus, that by his death and resurrection we can be saved.

But we thank you also that in the gospel and particularly at his resurrection, we see Jesus declared as King and Lord and that you have given him all authority in heaven and earth.

And so because he is Lord, Father, we pray that everyone would treat him as Lord, would glorify him and honor him as he deserves. And therefore, Father, we pray that you would help us to promote your gospel to that end.

[21 : 52] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.