

How to Promote the Gospel? - Part 1

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[0 : 00] with the first reading, so you might like to flick back to there in a moment. But before we get on the way, how about I pray for us? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. We thank you that you continue to speak to us through it, that you continue to remind us who you are, what you've done for us through Jesus, and how it is that we might respond, particularly responding by doing what we can to proclaim his name.

Not just for the sake of the lost, but for the sake of Jesus. So Father, we pray that you might help us to understand your word tonight, but more than that, to apply it to our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now people promote products in all sorts of ways, don't they? Here's an advert from McDonald's. Next slide, Kenny. No, next one. Yeah, here we go.

Promoting their milkshakes. They thought that was pretty clever. It sounded mildly amusing, I guess. The next one, it's not funny, but I like. It's from Kit Kat. I think it's kind of clever. Anyway.

[1 : 08] Now the companies went to great extremes. So a couple of years ago, IKEA promoted their latest styles by decorating a monorail. So next slide. So they actually decorated the whole outside of the monorail.

This is in Japan. And the next slide, we see the interior design. It's taking advertising to a whole new level, isn't it? On the Netherlands, to promote the conservation of water, they painted a whole street blue and added the words, water is life.

So here's the next shot. We get the aerial view. Next slide, Kenny. You can see the letters, W-A-T-E-R, and then L-I-F. So water. Sorry, I-S.

Water is. And you can't quite see life there. Water is life. Now, maybe we could promote the gospel by painting Doncaster Road with the words, Jesus is life.

That's not a bad idea, is it? It'd certainly get people talking, though it would perhaps get us in trouble with the council. But it does raise the question, how do we promote the gospel? And that is, how do we get people to hear the good news about Jesus who died for us and rose again?

[2 : 13] We have seen over the last two weeks, as Gillian said at the start of the service, that we must promote the gospel, firstly because Jesus is Lord, and so he deserves to be treated as Lord by all people.

And the only way that will happen is if they become Christians, and so we promote the gospel for that reason. But we also saw last week that people are in danger. That's the reality. People are in danger, and more than that, we have something that's worth sharing.

We have the escape plan, the gospel, for Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And so we are to do all we can to seek and save others.

So what can we do to seek and save the lost? Well, today and next week, we'll be looking at the how, as Gillian said, how all Christians can promote the gospel, no matter how old you are, or what sort of sphere of life you're from.

This week, I want us to consider two things, prayer and partnership, and then next week, we're going to look at living and speaking. And we might have a question time, with Mark's permission, of course, after next week.

[3 : 17] So if you've got any questions about the series, you can ask them then. So the first thing on the outlines there, point one, we can promote the gospel through prayer. And here we come to the reading from Matthew.

So as I said, if you've got your Bibles there, please turn to Matthew chapter nine. Okay. Okay.

This is pretty much a hinge in Matthew's gospel. It both looks back to what's happened so far, and it looks forward to what will happen next. So verse 35, it looks back by summarizing what Jesus has done so far.

Verse 35 says, Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and sickness.

That's what Jesus has been doing so far in the gospel. And then verse 37 looks forward. Verse 37, Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

[4 : 15] Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Here Jesus looks forward to what he's about to do, and that is the sending out of his disciples.

This is the first involvement in Jesus' mission that his disciples have. And notice what the first thing they are to do is. What's the first thing they are to do? Verse 38, sorry, verse 37, The harvest is plentiful, and the laborers are few.

Not go, but therefore ask, or pray, to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest field. You see, Jesus says there are lots of people who need to be saved, the harvest is plentiful, and so we are to pray, to ask for more people to go out to preach the gospel.

Now there are three different Greek words that is used in the Bible for the word prayer, or pray. And the one used here for the word ask you, it can be also translated as pray, it also means literally beg.

Beg the Lord of the harvest. You see, we're not just simply to pray, but to beg. Why? Well, because of verse 36, the verse we missed. Verse 36, When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep, without a shepherd.

[5 : 36] You see, Jesus says, the people have no shepherd, which is a great indictment on the Pharisees and the rulers of the time, who were supposed to be the shepherds, who were supposed to guide the people of God, in God's ways.

And so these people are harassed and helpless, or literally thrown aside. They are lost sheep, without a shepherd, and now in danger of judgment. And so Jesus has compassion on them.

And the word for compassion here refers to a deep, internal reaction in your stomach. As one commentator put it, he said, When Jesus saw these crowds who were helpless, he was gutted.

In March last year, there was a massive earthquake in Japan with a 40-meter tsunami. Over 15,000 people died. I don't know if you remember that.

It's just over a year ago. But I remember seeing the news and I remember seeing pictures, like the next slide, thanks, Kenny, of a girl, you know, amidst all this destruction, just sitting there, helpless, and harassed, as it were, surrounded by destruction.

[6 : 40] And to make it worse, it snowed shortly after, and the next slide shows a man in tears as he sat near the place his wife was killed. And as I saw the plight of these people, I felt gutted.

That's how Jesus felt when he saw these people here, when he saw the plight of these lost sheep of Israel. For these had not lost loved ones or homes, but were themselves spiritually lost and in danger of eternal judgment.

And there are so many of them. Jesus says the harvest is plentiful. That is, there are plenty of people who are in danger and need to be saved. And the workers are too few.

So the first thing he says is pray for more workers because there are so many in danger. Interestingly, Jesus answers his own prayer or their prayer by sending them out.

But the first thing we're to do is to pray for workers. Of course, it's not just more workers we're to pray for, but also to pray for those in danger themselves. For example, Paul says in Romans chapter 9, on the next slide, he says this, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart, for I could wish that I myself were cursed and caught up from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

[8 : 05] And it's out of this deep concern for his own countrymen that he continues to write in chapter 10, verse 1, brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

See the connection? Out of this deep compassion for the lost, Paul prays that they may be saved. You see, that's why I spoke last week on the danger that people are in without Jesus.

Because the world, and sadly, even too many churches ignore that reality. But we must remember the reality that people without Jesus are in danger and that ought to drive us to prayer.

The interesting thing to note here, as I mentioned in Matthew, is that Jesus says, pray first. You see, if Jesus had said to me, the harvest is plentiful, pricey, you know, I want you to go out and share the gospel with everyone, the first thing I'd be doing, great, alright, who's come with me, let's go, let's pack our bags and off we go.

I wouldn't need to pray. But the first thing he tells his disciples to do is to pray. Why? I want to suggest that the reason he says pray first is because it's not our harvest, it's the Lord's.

[9 : 18] You see, verse 38 again, we ought to pray to the Lord of the harvest. It's the Lord's harvest, it's his work, his mission, his church, he's in control and only he can change people's hearts.

You've got your Bibles there, turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, it's on page 927. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, here the Corinthians were arguing over who the best leader was.

And so, in chapter 3, verse 5, we read this, Paul writes, what then is Apollos, who's one of the spectacular leaders they were arguing over, and what is Paul?

Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants working together, you are God's field, God's building.

[10 : 40] Do you see, it's only God who does the work, who makes things grow, who can raise up workers, who can grow his church, his building, his field, and so we are to firstly pray.

There was a young guy who was interested in a girl at my old church, that's often how it works, so he started coming along to church with her. Now the girl rightly said that she would not go out with him because he wasn't a Christian and she explained the gospel to him a few times and whenever I saw him at church, I preached as persuasively as I could, came up with really good illustrations and chuckled in a bit of humour here and there and I thought it was okay.

And I said, do you know that? Nothing. No change. He didn't become a Christian. He then went on a working holiday, took a Bible the girl had given him and while reading the Bible alone in his room in Canada, he became a Christian.

Far away from my preaching. See, the point is, it's only God who gives growth, isn't it? It's only God who changes hearts and so we must, we must pray.

We must pray for our friends and family and others we know, firstly out of compassion for they are in danger and secondly because it's only God who gives growth.

[12 : 08] It's his harvest, his mission, his church. And thirdly, we ought to pray because it's the way God operates. As you know, praying is not a waste of time. It's actually God's chosen means to achieve his purposes.

That is, God actually uses our prayers to accomplish what he wants to accomplish. One of the classic examples of this is from the Old Testament book of Job. In Job 42, which will come on the screen, God is angry with Job's friends because they have not spoken of God what is right but God says to them, My servant Job will pray for you and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.

You see, God knows what he's going to do. He knows he's going to forgive them but he'll only do it in answer to Job's prayer. It is, I think, one of the clearest examples of the way God chooses to use our prayers to achieve his purposes.

And we see the same thing in the New Testament as well. The next verse, the next slide, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10, he says, On God we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers.

The Corinthians prayers actually help Paul as God answers them, you see. God uses our prayers to achieve his purposes. Is that not an incentive to pray?

[13 : 33] What's more, prayer is actually front line gospel work. For example, on the next slide, Romans 15 verse 30, Paul writes this, he says, I urge you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

You see, Paul is out there going around proclaiming the gospel. He's doing front line evangelism or teaching, sharing the gospel. And he says here, this front line gospel ministry is a struggle.

And in particular, he's worried about his journey to Jerusalem that he's heading there. But notice that Paul says that by their prayers, they are joining with him in his ministry, in his struggle.

In other words, by praying, they join Paul on the front line of gospel work. Now, some of us here, for whatever reason, may be unable to go overseas and be a missionary, for example.

Now, maybe you still haven't left home yet, maybe you can't drive a car so it might be hard, or whatever it is. Some of us don't have time to do CRA teaching in schools, or some of us might not be able to do youth group on a Friday night, so whatever it is, but we can all pray.

[14 : 39] And by praying, we are actually joining with those who are on the front line proclaiming the gospel. And that too is a reason to pray. Now, from my experience, Holy Trinity is one of those, is one of the most prayerful churches that I've actually come across.

I know lots of people who faithfully attend MOF, you know, Missionary Outreach Fellowship, and keep praying. We've got the prayer circle, we've got this 6pm prayer time after the service down the front here.

it's a pretty prayerful church compared to the ones that I've been in. But I also know that it's sometimes a struggle for many of us to pray regularly.

And I also know that when we have a parish prayer night, which is coming up on the 26th of June, by the way, it's not all that well attended given the church our size. And so we still need encouragement to pray.

So can I encourage you to keep praying? And to help you do this, when you walked in, you were going to receive one of these lime green cards, the little prayer cards.

[15 : 43] The one I made was a yellow bookmark. This is the one, this is the new and improved version, prayer bookmark 2.0 or something. But in a moment, after the service, we're going to take this out and we're going to fill it in.

I want you to think of someone, two people you can pray for and pray for them. There's a prayer on the back. If you don't know what to pray, that'll get you started. Okay, we need to pray.

We must pray for it's only God who changes people's hearts. The most fundamental way we can all promote the gospel is through prayer.

Our second way is through partnership and here we come to our second main reading. So please, turn in your Bibles to Philippians 4.0 Actually, I'm going to start in chapter 1 just to look at a couple of verses.

Paul is writing from prison. Most likely, he's in Rome. And he begins his letter in verse 3 by saying this. He says, I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying you, praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

[17 : 02] I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. Paul begins by saying he prays with joy for the Philippians.

Why? Well, there are a few reasons, but the most obvious one is there in verse 5. He says because of their sharing or their partnership, the word is, in the gospel.

Now, a sharing in something or a partnership in something usually involves people working together for a common cause. Not too long ago in the US, in the state of Kentucky, there were two men who were in partnership.

They had a common cause. Their common cause was to rob an ATM machine. One of them sat in their own car. It was a pickup truck. While the other tied the chain to the bumper and then tied it to the ATM machine.

The driver reversed the car. He floored it. Instead of pulling the ATM machine out, it just pulled the bumper bar off. Somewhat embarrassed by the whole incident, they fled the scene, leaving behind their bumper bar which had the number plate on it.

[18 : 07] They were arrested an hour later. There are all sorts of partnerships, aren't they? And they usually have a common cause. Now, of course, verse 5, their partnership, their sharing is not robbery but the gospel.

The Philippians were in partnership with Paul in promoting the gospel and so he prays with joy. But how did they partner Paul? Well, no doubt they prayed for Paul and for the work of the gospel but chapter 4 makes it clear that their partnership was primarily financial.

That is, they partnered Paul by giving money. Please turn to our reading now to chapter 4 and have a look from verse 10. Chapter 4, verse 10. Paul writes, I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me.

Indeed, you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it. Here Paul starts off by saying, you know, he's glad at last they've revived or they've renewed their concern for him.

Not because they, you know, finally got their act together and decided to do something for Paul but it seems as though they had no opportunity for whatever reason to send money. But now they can. Not that Paul is asking for money as he says in verse 11.

[19 : 21] He says, Not that I am referring to being in need for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little. I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learnt the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. See, Paul has learnt to trust God in all circumstances yet that's not to say he's ungrateful for their help and so he says in verse 14 he says, In any case it was still kind of you to share in my distress.

Now it's interesting that Paul says they share or partner same word again here not only in the gospel chapter 1 verse 5 but also in his distress. Now does this mean they went to prison as well because that's where Paul was writing this letter from?

Well no, of course not. Well they shared in his distress by giving and so we read in verse 15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church shared same word again partner with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.

For even when I was in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I have been paid in full and have more than enough I am fully satisfied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent a fragrant offering a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God and my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to the riches in glory in Christ Jesus to our God and Father be glory forever and ever Amen.

[21 : 01] See the Philippians gave money didn't they? They gave money to Paul and in so doing shared in his gospel work even shared in his distress by giving money no it's by giving it put them on the front line of gospel work as well even though it was Paul who was doing the preaching and it was Paul who was doing the suffering and as Paul receives this current gift from Epaphroditus he remembers their generosity from the beginning in fact they were the only ones to give in the beginning he says much to the shame of the other churches and so Paul far from buttering them up for yet another gift wants to commend them in verse 17 and can I commend people here you here at Holy Trinity who give I know there are plenty of people here who give generously by your giving you are promoting the gospel as you partner us and our link missionaries and so on to proclaim the gospel and what's more by your giving you are on the front line of gospel work and so can I thank you again now for those of us who are at uni or at school who don't earn much money can I say

God doesn't care how much you give whether it's five cents five dollars five hundred dollars what he's concerned about is the attitude behind the giving the attitude of generosity that seeks to support gospel work and the good of others and so if you are not giving then can I encourage you to start even if it's only a little bit you know five cents ten cents whatever it is it doesn't matter because if you don't get in the habit of giving now when you do get money it's not going to be any easier now I know things are tight but if our giving is the first thing that gets cut when things are tight or we simply don't give it all then what does this suggest about how important we think the gospel is I'm sorry to put it bluntly but that's the reality we have an opportunity to be partners in the gospel through our financial partnership to invest not in shares but in lives that will see eternity there was a guy at one of my old churches Phil and we had an outreach event it was a soccer clinic that ran over a few days in the school holidays and it was for primarily aged kids so we advertised during the schools and the idea was that the kids would come to us and we actually flew in a professional coach from the states and they learned some soccer skills and they also had a very short Bible study that introduced them to Jesus and at the end of the week we invited their parents along had a little trophy award ceremony and had a very short talk as a way of getting the parents to be introduced to

Jesus. Now I remember having a meeting a planning meeting for this soccer clinic. Now we wanted to keep the cost as low as possible so as many kids could come but things cost money so we're talking about how much do we charge for these things.

Other soccer and AFL and other clinics charge money so we could too as well. So we thought how do we keep the cost low? One of the guys Phil said I've got a thousand dollars in my wallet burning a hole.

We'll give that. Now I'm sure it wasn't burning a hole in his wallet. I'm sure it wasn't in his way. He was saying I've got a thousand bucks it's just in my way. Here we can have that. He wasn't saying really that the thousand dollars was in the way but he was really keen to see the gospel go out.

[24 : 26] He even took leave without pay from work to attend the soccer clinic even though he was more of a cricket guy. Now as I said the amount is not the important part it's the attitude. He knew these kids were in danger and so he wanted them as many as possible to hear the gospel that they might be saved.

And so he put his money where his mouth was and sought to promote the gospel by his financial partnership you see. Now I doubt anything I've said tonight is new to you. In fact I was a little concerned about doing a series at Holy Treaty because this church is well known for its Bible teaching you know I want to give something really meaty come up with something new but in the end it's not about coming up with something new it's doing what we already know.

That's the trick isn't it? You see we can know all there is to know yet unless we act on it then our knowledge is for nothing. So remember we're not promoting a product that lasts only a short time.

We're promoting a person, Jesus and the message of his death and resurrection which saves people from a very real hell and brings them to a very real heaven and that lasts an eternity.

And so more than any other thing this gospel is worth promoting both with our prayers and our partnership. Let's pray that we would do both. Let's pray. Gracious heavenly Father we do thank you again for this gospel message about Jesus.

[25 : 55] that because he died for us and was raised again we could be made right with you if we simply believe in him. Father we thank you that this message is worth sharing to others.

Father we pray for those who might be here tonight who may not know Jesus. We pray that they might put their trust in him and be saved from hell and head for heaven.

For those of us who do know Jesus we pray Father that you would help us to be so gripped by the gospel and the reality of the lost that we might seek to promote the gospel both through our prayers and through financial partnership.

We pray it for Jesus sake. Amen. I believe we're going to sing again. No? I'll just be quiet now.

I'll just be there. Thank you.