

Why Promote the Gospel? - Part 2

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[0 : 00] Some years ago, Michelle and I had the opportunity to visit her brother in Sweden for his wedding. We had hired a car and had to head out early one morning, and so there was virtually no traffic on the road, except for one semi-trailer truck, which had just come over the crest in the opposite direction.

And as it got close, I started to think, what is this guy doing? He's heading straight for us. And so I flashed my lights at him, and he flashed his lights back at me. And we got closer and closer, and then suddenly Michelle yelled, you're on the wrong side of the road!

And I swerved, and we missed the truck. I'd forgotten that in Sweden, you drive on the other side of the road. And we were lucky to miss the Volvo truck, and I know it was a Volvo because I got a real good look.

And I was very thankful to Michelle for yelling at me that time. No, she doesn't. She doesn't yell. But what would you do if you saw someone in danger?

A child reaching for a hot cup of coffee left on a table. A car reversing the car park about to hit someone walking behind. Or a child in an indoor swimming pool crawls towards the edge while the mother is distracted dressing the other child.

[1 : 14] They're just three situations that I've been in just in the last year or so. What would you do? Assuming you were close enough to be able to say something, would you say something? Well, today we're continuing our series in promoting the gospel.

And again, we're considering the question of why. Why promote the gospel? Last week we saw the fundamental reason the Bible gives. That is, we are to promote the gospel so that people will treat Jesus as Lord, for that is who he is.

That was the big reason. And this week, we're going to cover a bit more territory. Last week was a bit of a shortish sermon. It's going to be a little bit longer today. We're going to cover a bit more territory because of the topical nature of this sermon series.

And we're going to look at three more related reasons why we should promote the gospel. So please stick with me. The first one will be the longest. And that first reason is because people are in danger.

Point one. Now, I know you know this. But we need to be reminded of this reality because people deny it. It's not politically correct to believe in a God who will judge.

[2 : 19] And often we simply forget just how real it is. But it is real. And so let's have a look at what the Bible says about it. Please turn to 2 Thessalonians, page 961, which was the first Bible reading.

2 Thessalonians, chapter 1, page 961. Here Paul describes the destination of those who don't believe. He starts off, though, in verses 3 and 4, by thanking God for the faith of the Thessalonians, who have persevered even despite persecution.

And then in verse 5 and 6, he says this. Verse 5. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God. And it's intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.

For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you. Paul says here, This, that is their faith under fire, is evidence that God's judgment is right.

That is because people were persecuting them, it shows God's judgment is necessary. It is warranted. Because people persecute, because people afflict others and cause trouble, then it is just of God to pay back people for what they have done.

[3 : 31] Now, I know that some people don't like the idea of God's judgment. God's love is much nicer to think about. But the thing to remember is that God's love means he must judge.

I mean, would it be loving for a judge in a human courtroom to say to a criminal, Oh, don't worry. Don't worry about the family getting justice for the daughter or son that you just killed.

You can go off and have a nice day today. Would that be loving? Of course not. God's love actually demands God's justice. It demands he gives all people what they deserve.

And that, unfortunately, includes us. Unless, unless, of course, we believe in Jesus who took the punishment in our place.

And so if we believe in Jesus, we escape the punishment we deserve and instead find relief. See verse 7? He says, not only afflict those who afflict you, but also to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us.

[4 : 31] When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, it says. You see, when Jesus returns, God will judge. There will be payback for those who do not believe and have done wrong and ignored God and so on.

But there is also, for those who believe, relief. You see, there's two sides to the one coin of God's judgment. There is retribution, if you like.

And on the other side, there's relief for us who believe. And that word relief is a great word, especially for Christians like the Sudanese Christians who are being persecuted in Sudan.

That word relief would bring great comfort to them. As I said, there are two sides to God's judgment, punishment and relief. And it all depends on whether you know Jesus.

See verse 8 to 10? It says, when Jesus returns in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

[5 : 32] These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. When he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among those who have believed.

You see, verse 8 says, it's all about whether you know God and obey the gospel. Now, they're not two things. It's actually just one thing. Because if you obey the gospel, you will know God.

And to obey the gospel means simply to believe. That's what the gospel message is. Believe that Jesus is both Lord and Savior. Trust in him as Lord and Savior. And so if you believe in Jesus, you know God and are saved.

But if you do not, then you are headed for very real danger. George Pell, the Roman Catholic cardinal, got this very wrong. Just last week, and many of you will know, that the show called Q&A; on TV, the cardinal said that an atheist can go to heaven.

An atheist does not believe, of course, in God. And so I'd rather take God's word than George Pell's word, as much as I'm sure he's a nice guy. But the point here is all about whether you believe or not believe in Jesus.

[6 : 47] That's the difference between heaven and hell. For those who ignore God and the gospel, those who continue to do evil, well, the Bible says there is everlasting destruction, which is a terrible picture, really, isn't it?

I mean, the only comfort you can take in the destruction of people is that it will end. But this one doesn't. It's everlasting, it says.

And this destruction also includes being shut out from the presence of the Lord Jesus. The idea here is that hell is separation of fellowship with Jesus, separation from his blessings and so on.

We're not separated from God's rule. So hell is not a complete separation from God, if you like. But it is separation from his glory, his blessings, his fellowship.

All the good things which come from God. I remember back in my university days, I used to work at the Golden Arches, McDonald's, flipping burgers. In fact, that's how I paid for Michelle's engagement ring.

[7 : 43] And there were some guys there who would, you know, come and talk about what they got up to on the weekend. And they'd often try and outdo each other in the kind of mischief that they got up to.

And if someone did something particularly bad, another person would say, oh, that's bad. You're going to go to hell for that one. And I heard one person respond by saying this. He said, that's all right. All my mates will be there.

But they won't be. Mateship, friendship, that's a blessing. That's a good thing. And all good things come from God. And if we're separated from all good things, then no mateship in hell, no friendship, nothing good will be there.

Perhaps one of the most terrifying pictures of hell is from Revelation chapter 14. You can just listen to me read it to you or you can turn to it in your Bibles. It's Revelation 14, looking at verse 14 to 20.

Here we have a picture of God's final judgment. It's page 1003 if you'd like to turn there, but just listen if you like. Then I looked. This is John writing.

[8 : 45] And there was a white cloud. And seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.

Another angel came out of the temple calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud. Use your sickle and reap. That is judge. For the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.

So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven and he too had a sharp sickle.

Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire. And he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle. Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth for its grapes are ripe.

So the angel swung its sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth. And he threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the winepress as high as a horse's bridle for a distance of about 200 miles, 300 kilometers.

[10 : 01] It's pretty horrific, isn't it? Bet you're glad you got out of bed for this one this morning. But this is where people are headed. If they don't believe in Jesus. Surely then this is motivation enough to promote the gospel.

Surely this is motivation enough to do all we can to share Jesus with others in our various opportunities that come our way. And if you are here this morning as someone who does not believe in Jesus, then please reconsider.

So you don't end up there. Now for some of us here, we may be thinking that this is all too excessive and too harsh. But we need to remember four things. First, God is in the end giving people what they want.

If they want a life without God, without a right relationship with him, then he'll give them that. But a life without a relationship with God means hell. Second, God is just, which means some will suffer more than others in hell, but all deserve to be there.

He is simply giving people what they deserve. Third, if we think that it is more than they deserve, then could it be because we have forgotten how harshly we've treated God in the first place?

[11 : 18] Could it be because we've underestimated how dreadfully sinful sin is? And therefore, how utterly deserving of judgment we all are. We had a Book of Common Prayer service this morning at 8am.

As you know, the BCP or the Book of Common Prayer was written by Cormor. And just let me read one verse. We don't use it much today because the language is very different.

But he got something right. Well, he got many things right. But let me read this. Here is a man who took sin seriously, didn't he?

And he was forever grateful for Jesus. You see, if we think God's judgment is too harsh, is it because we've not taken sin seriously enough? That's the third reason we need to remember.

And fourthly, we need to remember that God does not delight in this. In Ezekiel chapter 33, which will come up on the screen, I believe. So just on the next slide. Thanks, Henry. God says, God doesn't delight in judging people.

[12 : 53] Or from Isaiah 28, which is the next slide. The Lord will rise up, that is to judge, in the context of chapter 28, as he did at Mount Perizim. And he will rouse himself, as in the Valley of Gibeon, to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.

That is, God's work of judgment is not what he naturally tends towards. It's strange or alien to him, if you like. I tried to use that excuse on Michelle one day when I had to do some ironing.

Oh, no, the ironing is strange and alien work to me. I still had to do it. And for God, he must judge as well, in order to be just.

But it's not what he naturally likes to do. In fact, because he doesn't like to judge, he in fact gave his son to take the judgment in our place. I'm sure you all know this verse.

You might like to finish it off for me. For God so loved the world that he... So that whoever believes in him shall not... But have...

[13 : 58] Exactly. Which brings us to point two and Luke 19. So please turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 19, page 854. This is a reasonably well-known story of Zacchaeus, or as my son used to

call him, Zucchini.

He was short in stature both physically and socially because he was a tax collector, and therefore he was hated by the Jews. Yet in verse 3, he wanted to see Jesus, the man he'd heard so much about.

And so in verse 4, we read that he climbs a sycamore tree to see, but gets more than he bargained for. Instead of just getting a glimpse of Jesus, he gets the privilege of hosting Jesus at his home.

And so let's pick it up at verse number 5. Verse number 5. Here Jesus says, He must stay with Zacchaeus.

And the Greek word is very emphatic. He must stay with him. But why? Why must he stay with Zacchaeus? Is it because he's hungry? Of course not. He could have got food anywhere. Why must he stay with this sinner?

[15:29] And the answer, of course, comes in verse 10. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost. People like Zacchaeus.

People who are sinners like Zacchaeus. And look at how Zacchaeus responds. It says that he was happy, which is a bit of a downplay on the original Greek word.

The original Greek word means with rejoicing. Zacchaeus is cheering that Jesus is coming over. It was a real privilege to host someone as important as him. But everyone else can't believe it.

And because of Jesus' love for him, that he would want to have fellowship with Zacchaeus, well, Zacchaeus responds with repentance and faith. At verse 8, Zacchaeus stood up there and said to the Lord, Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much. Now, it seems as though somewhere between verse 7 and verse 8, we move from the tree in the street to Zacchaeus' home.

[16:31] And here he stands up, perhaps with others looking in through the window, as they often did when they followed Jesus around. And here Zacchaeus says he will give back four times what he has defrauded others, what he has stolen from others.

Why four times? Because that's what the Old Testament law demanded of those who stole from others. And so what it shows us is this is genuine repentance here on view.

And presumably he then trusted in Jesus, whom he had heard so much about. Now, the text doesn't tell us explicitly that he trusted or had faith, but we are told in verse 9, See, Zacchaeus is saved.

And as verse 10 indicates, this episode of Zacchaeus shows us why Jesus came. He came to seek and save those in very real danger. And a week later, he then went to the cross so that people could be saved from that very real danger.

And so we had to promote the gospel, not only because people are in danger, but also because there is a way out of that danger. It's why Jesus came. In fact, Jesus does not desire the death of a sinner either.

[17:50] In fact, if you just skip over to verse 41 of chapter 19 for a moment, it's down the bottom right-hand corner of your Bibles, the Pew Bibles, chapter 19, verse 41. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem. And as he came near, he saw the city and he wept over it.

Saying, If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you and hem you in on every side.

They will crush you to the ground and you and your children within you. And they will not leave within you one stone upon another because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.

See, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem here because he knows where people are headed. These people are headed for judgment because they did not recognize Jesus. They did not accept Jesus. Now, this judgment refers in the first instance to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans. But it does point us to the greater judgment of hell for those who do not accept Jesus like the Jews of his day.

[18:57] And Jesus loves them so much that he weeps over them, verse 41. That word wept, verse 41, refers to more than just a couple of tears. It's the word for sobbing, wailing.

I remember speaking with a godly Christian man who was going on holidays. He was flying out from Sydney up to the Gold Coast. And as he flew out over the houses and roads and cars and people

going about their business, he was suddenly struck by something.

Something that moved him to actually well up in tears. And as he told me, he said that something was knowing as he looked down at all those people that so many of them were headed for hell because they did not know Jesus.

And his eyes welled up. Hadn't happened to him before. Now, I'm not suggesting we need to weep every time we see non-Christians as Jesus did. But, I mean, if we did, we'd get so emotionally drained we couldn't do anything else.

But I am suggesting that to follow Jesus is to share something of his love and concern for the lost. And to follow Jesus is to remember that people without him are headed for a very real hell.

[20 : 09] And so to follow Jesus is to do all we can to seek and save the lost. And this brings us to point three, our final point and final passage. So please turn one more time in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10 this time.

Page 932. 932. You doing well? Last one. Page 932. 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 31.

This is actually Paul's conclusion to his instructions about whether Corinthians should eat certain food or not. And he says in chapter 10 verse 31, he says, So whether you eat or drink certain food or, in fact, whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Here Paul says, Whether you eat or drink certain food, in fact, whatever you do, should be governed by three principles.

[21 : 17] First one is verse 31. Do everything for the glory of God. The second one is verse 32. Do not cause offense. Paul doesn't mean here, you know, be polite, although we should be.

He really means don't cause anyone to stumble from salvation. Stumble from Jesus. You see, the Corinthians were eating certain foods in pagan temples, and it seems as though it was causing some Christians to turn from Christ back to those pagan idols, causing them to stumble from Jesus. And Paul says, Whatever you do, do for the glory of God, and make sure you don't cause anyone to stumble from salvation. Instead, verse 33, Do everything you can to please everyone.

Not just to please them or to make you feel good, but verse 33, So that they may be saved. This is what we're to do.

Why? Because it's what Jesus came to do. Chapter 11, verse 1, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. You see, seeking to save those in danger is not an optional extra for Christians.

[22 : 25] It's part of what it means to be a Christian. Now, this will look different for us in various ways, and we'll come to that in the following weeks. But I just want to show you a short video clip of an atheist.

This man, his surname is Penn. He's part of a comedy duo. In fact, I've got it. There's Penn and Teller. There's some magicians who run shows over in the United States.

Most of you may not have heard of them, but they're pretty famous in the United States. Anyway, after a show one night, a man gave Penn, which is a tall one, a Bible. He'd seen the show the night before, and he came back the next night to give Penn a Bible.

Now, as I said, Penn is an atheist, but he recognised this man was trying to convert him. In Penn's words, this man was trying to proselytise, which just means convert. And I want you to look at how Penn responds to this in the video clip.

Thanks, Henry. It was really wonderful. I believe he knew that I was an atheist.

[23 : 28] And he was truly complimentary. It wasn't in any way, it didn't seem like empty flattery. He was really kind and nice and sane and looked me in the eyes and talked to me and then gave me this Bible.

And I've always said, you know, that I don't respect people who don't proselytise. I don't respect that at all. If you believe that there's a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think that, well, it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward.

And atheists who think that people shouldn't proselytise, just leave me alone, keep your religion to yourself. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytise?

How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? I mean, if I believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it, that truck was bearing down on you, there's a certain point where I tackle you.

And this is more important than that. And I've always thought that, and I've written about that, and I've thought of it conceptually. This guy was a really good guy.

[24 : 45] He was polite and honest and sane, and he cared enough about me to proselytise and give me a Bible. Now, I know there's no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that.

But I'll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man. Although Penn is still an atheist, I can't help but wonder, given the profound impact of this one man on him, whether if he met a few more godly Christians, he might change his view.

But the reason I show you this is to make the point that Penn makes, that if we believe in heaven and hell and don't do all we can to see others saved, then it's pretty unloving, isn't it?

Even an atheist gets that. You see, to love your neighbour as yourself, or to love whomever you have contact with, means to seek their good. And that means not just collecting the mail when they're away or dropping around a meal if they're sick, though it includes that, but it also means seeking their ultimate good.

Being saved from danger, saved from hell and headed for heaven. Now, how are we to do this? What will it look like? Well, keep coming over the next two weeks and we'll look at some of the ways the Bible suggests.

[26 : 06] And as I said, some of it will look different for different people. I mean, we're not all gifted evangelists, but we are all, at the very least, to pray for non-Christians, we know. We are all to try and spend time with them, building friendships with them, helping them, and doing what we can to see them saved.

I know it takes effort. But this is what it means to follow Jesus. A friend of mine called Mike became a Christian when he was a teenager. And as he got more involved in the church, he kind of drifted away from his non-Christian friends.

And it often happens. You get more new friends. You've got something more in common about the Christian faith and so on. And then it occurred to him that if he was to evangelize, if he was to share Jesus with others who don't know Jesus, then he actually has to meet others who are non-Christians.

And so he started a soccer team and invited some of his old mates along. He got on well with one of them in particular. And once a month, he'd invite this guy, Adam, to his house to have dinner. Adam and his girlfriend would come over to Mike and Emily's house. Mike and Emily were married, and they'd have dinner. And slowly, bit by bit, he'd invite them to church, talk about Jesus every now and again. And to this day, Adam and his girlfriend, Simone, are now Christians.

[27 : 15] Now, it won't always work like that, but are we at least making efforts to get to know non-Christians? And my father-in-law joined the Rotary Club for that purpose, to get to know some non-Christians so that he might have opportunities to see them saved.

This is why we're to promote the gospel, because people are in danger, because Jesus came to seek and save, and because following Jesus means we'll do all we can to see others saved.

And we're to do it with a profound sense of thankfulness, for we too were once in danger, but for the grace of God, we now have eternal life. And so we are to promote the gospel that others may share that life too.

We are, in Paul's words, to be imitators of him as he is of Christ. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we don't like thinking about hell and judgment, particularly because we have people we love who don't know you.

Father, we pray that you might have mercy on them. And Father, we pray that you would help us to do what we can to seek and save the lost, that more people might share the eternal life and hope of heaven that we have.

[28 : 38] And we ask it ultimately for your glory. Amen. We're going to sing hymn number 550, May the Mind of Christ My Saviour.

The words will come up on the screen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.