

How to Promote the Gospel? - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Please take a seat. Well, this morning, as you know, we're in the middle of a topical sermon series called Promoting the Gospel, and so we'll need to do a bit more Bible flicking again.

That's the nature of topical sermons. So why don't we pray that God will help us stay with it to understand, most of all, to live in light of what we read.

So let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Gospel of Jesus, the good news that he died for us and was raised again so that we might have a new life.

And therefore, Father, we thank you that this Gospel is always worth sharing, for it is the power of salvation for all who believe. And so, Father, we pray that as we think about how we can promote this Gospel, that you might give us minds to understand your Word and hearts that would seek to live it out.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, people promote products in all sorts of ways, don't they? McDonald's has all sorts of ads.

[1 : 13] In fact, there's one ad I'd like to show you. This is for real milkshakes. Yeah. Other companies go to even greater extremes.

A couple of years ago, IKEA promoted their latest styles by decorating a monorail in Japan. So we've got the next slide. That's what it looked like on the outside. And then next is what it looked like on the inside, just to promote their latest styles.

Or in the Netherlands, to promote the conservation of water, they painted a whole street blue. Here it is. And they also wrote the words, water is life. So on the next slide, you can just make out the word water down the bottom and maybe the word is at the top, water is life.

Now, maybe we could promote the Gospel by painting Doncaster Road and just saying, Jesus is life or something like that. It would certainly get people talking, although it would perhaps get us in trouble with the council. But it does raise the question, though, how do we promote the Gospel? How do we promote the good news about Jesus who died for us and rose again? For as we have seen over the last two weeks, it is a Gospel that we must promote.

[2 : 21] Why? Well, firstly, because as we've seen, Jesus is Lord and so he deserves to be treated as Lord by everyone. And that happens as they come to believe in the Gospel. Secondly, it's because people are in danger and they need to be saved.

And so we promote the Gospel. And thirdly, because following Jesus means sharing something of his love for others and his mission to seek and save the lost. And so we must promote the Gospel. But how? Well, that's what we're looking at today and next week. We're looking at how all Christians can promote the Gospel. And the first way is point one in your outlines. It's through prayer, which is no surprise to you, I'm sure.

And here we come to our first reading from Matthew. So if you've got your Bibles there, please turn with me to Matthew chapter 9, page 790. Matthew 9, starting at verse 35.

This passage in Matthew's Gospel is like a hinge. It sort of summarizes of what has happened beforehand and then looks forward to what will happen next.

[3 : 27] So verse 35, we read, 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 every sickness.

So that's looking back. That's what Jesus has been doing during that time. And then verse 37 now looks forward, the other half of the hinge, to what is about to happen next. And here we read, we'll begin to read, the disciples' first involvement in that mission.

Verse 37, then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

And then Jesus, chapter 10, verse 1, summoned his 12 disciples, gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and so on, and then sent them out on his mission. And that's what Jesus is doing here.

Now, Jesus says there are lots of people here who need to be saved. And so we had to pray for more workers to go out and preach the gospel. Now, there's three Greek words used in the Bible which are translated as pray.

[4 : 33] And the one used here in verse 38, or ask, is the word that's the most emphatic for prayer, or asking, because it also means begging.

And so the idea here is that we're not simply to pray or just, you know, casually ask God to raise up more workers, but we're to beg, for the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few.

And more than that, look at the people's plight. Verse 36, the verse we missed. When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus says the people here have no shepherd, which is a great indictment on the religious rulers and leaders of their age, who were supposed to shepherd the people and show them the way they are to live for God.

And so the people are actually harassed and helpless, literally cast aside, thrown aside. They are the lost sheep who are in danger now of judgment. And so Jesus has compassion on them.

[5 : 41] And the word for compassion, he refers to a deep internal reaction. It refers to your internal organs. As one commentator put it, when Jesus saw these crowds who were helpless, he was gutted.

Last month marked the one year anniversary of the massive earthquake that hit Japan, and with it, the 40 meter tsunami that came. Over 15,000 died.

I don't know if you remember that event, but I remember seeing some pictures on the news, like this first one of a girl just sitting there amongst the devastation, crying.

And then when the snow hit very soon after, and I saw another picture like this man crying at the place where he lost his wife. And I saw many other more horrific pictures.

And when I saw the plight of these people, I felt gutted. That's what Jesus feels here. For these people are not headed for physical death and destruction.

[6 : 42] The people here are headed for eternal death and destruction. 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 yet the workers are too few. And so we are to pray, beg God for more workers, because there are so many in danger. Of course, it's not just workers we are to pray for, but also those who are in danger themselves.

We are to pray for them. In Romans chapter 9, which will come up on the screen, Paul writes this. He says, You see, Paul has this deep compassion himself for his own countrymen who are in danger.

And so later he writes in chapter 10, Verse 1, You see, 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 all people are in, God's judgment, which is not a particularly popular topic. It's not popular in society and it's not very popular in many churches, sadly.

[8 : 08] But we cannot ignore it. We must remember the danger people are in and that ought to drive us to prayer, like it did for Jesus, like it did for Paul. The interesting thing to note here, though, in Matthew, is that Jesus says to pray first.

You see, if Jesus said to me, The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few, my first response would be, Okay, let's go. Let's get out there. Let's gather some more workers. Let's go. We'll get out and get on with the task. But no, no. Jesus says, Pray first.

Why? Well, because it's the Lord's harvest. You see, verse 38, Matthew chapter 9, we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest. It is His harvest, His work, His mission.

He is in control and only He can change people's hearts, you see. During the week, we had our evangelistic courses running and we've had about 50 people over the course of the week, which is pretty good.

And some of the groups were up to a passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 3. And I will get you to turn here. I've put most of the verses on the screen, but if you could turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 3. We won't come back to Matthew.

[9:16] Page 927. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, page 927.

Here the Corinthians are arguing over who the best leader was and it was dividing the church. And so we pick it up at verse number 5. Paul says, What then is Apollos? What is poor? 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 labor of each. For we are God's servants working together. You are God's field, God's building.

You see, it's only God who can't change hearts. The Corinthians were arguing over who the best leader was and Paul's saying, we're only servants. God is the one who does the work.

[10:28] He is the one who changes hearts. He is the one who can raise up workers. He is the one who can grow his church, his building, his field. That's why we pray. There was a young man who started, well, pursuing a girl that used to go to my church so much so that he even started coming to church.

The girl very bravely said, look, I can't date you or go out with you or whatever we say these days because you're not a Christian. And so he went, oh, okay, I better come to church and find out what this was all about. And so he started coming to my church.

Now, she, the girl, explained the gospel to him several times. And after church, I explained the gospel to him and whenever I saw him come to church, I always made sure that I preached extra persuasively.

You know, a few cracker illustrations, hammered home the gospel. I don't know if I ever thumped the pulpit or anything like that. But you know, I tried my utmost and nothing.

No, no change. He didn't become a Christian. He then went on a working holiday and took a Bible the girl had given him, with him. And while he was reading the Bible alone in his room, he became a Christian.

[11:39] That was in Canada, the other side of the world, far away from my preaching. Maybe that's why he became a Christian. Rather, the point is, though, we can plant, we can water, but it's only God who changes hearts.

It's only God who gives the growth. And so we must, must pray. We must pray for our friends and family and others we know. For it's only God who gives growth.

It's his harvest, his mission, his church. And thirdly, we must pray because it's the way God operates. As you know, praying is not a waste of time for God uses our prayers to achieve his purposes.

One of the classic examples of this, I think, is from the Old Testament from the book of Job. It'll come up on the screen. It's Job 42, verse 8. God is angry with Job's friends because they have not spoken of God what is right.

And then 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. That's very interesting because God has told them what's going to happen.

[12:43] God already knows what he's going to do, but he's only going to do it through Job's prayer. You see that? I think it's one of the clearest examples of the way God chooses to use our prayers to achieve his purposes.

We see the same thing in the New Testament as well. And the next verse that will come up is from 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Here Paul writes, 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 helped Paul as God answered them. You see, God uses our prayers to achieve his purposes. And is that not an incentive to pray?

Is that not an extraordinary privilege we need to make use of? I mean, God the creator of the universe who created the universe doesn't need us.

He can do anything he likes. Yet he chooses to involve us in his mission. So we should pray because he uses our prayers to achieve his purposes.

[13:50] And the last thing we reason we should pray is because prayer is actually front line gospel work. For example, on the next slide, Romans 15, 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.

Here, I think Paul's struggle refers to the gospel ministry and in particular his journey to Jerusalem which he's quite worried about. He's not sure how the brothers will receive him. But notice that Paul says that by their prayers they are joining with him in his struggle, in his ministry.

In other words, by praying they join Paul on the front line of gospel work. We see something similar in Colossians but we won't have time to look at that today. Now this is very encouraging for us who, for whatever reason, can't be involved in proclaiming the word on the front line so to speak.

You know, for those of us who are unable to do missionary work or teach CRE or do youth group or that sort of thing. but we can still be on the front line through prayer, you see.

By praying we're actually joining with those who are on the front line proclaiming the gospel and this is also a reason to pray. Now, I've been part of several churches and from my experience Holy Trinity is one of the most prayerful churches I know.

[15:15] I'm not buttering you up being genuine. I mean, people faithfully attend the MOF meetings, the Missionary Outreach Fellowship which is on next Tuesday as I said and we have a prayer circle which is terrific and people constantly pray for one another and so can I thank you for praying, for being faithful in prayer but I also know it's sometimes a struggle for some of us to pray regularly and I also know that the parish prayer night is not all that well attended and so we still need encouragement to pray and so therefore can I encourage you to keep praying?

Pray at home, pray, come to the parish prayer night the next one's on the 26th of June we need to keep praying in fact I've inserted these little yellow bookmarks in your pew noses this is in fact it's not very flash at all it's pretty basic and I'm pretty sure you would have seen something like this before I can almost guarantee it but I want to urge you I want to encourage you to keep praying for those who don't know Jesus and so there's a space to write two names down of people you can be praying for in fact someone from 8am came up to me and said oh I used one of these and one person I was praying for became a Christian I'm still praying for the other one but yeah they're really good now I'm not sure how long this will last it's only flimsy paper you might lose it it might get wet or whatever but it's I want to do everything I can to encourage you to pray because through prayer we are promoting the gospel it's worthwhile well the most fundamental way we can all promote the gospel is through prayer the second way is through partnership and here we come to our second main reading so please turn to Philippians

I want to start at Philippians chapter 1 which is page 953 page 953 Paul is writing this letter from prison most likely 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 with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you why?

well because of your sharing or literally partnership in the gospel from the first day until now 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 see why does Paul pray with joy here?

well because verse 5 of their sharing or partnership in the gospel now sharing in something or a partnership in something usually involves people working together for a common cause doesn't it?

[18:04] not too long ago in the US in the state of Kentucky actually there were two men who were in partnership they had a common cause their cause was to rob an ATM machine and so one of them sat in their truck they used their own pickup truck because they thought that would do a good job while the other one took a chain tied it to the bumper of the pickup truck and then wrapped it around the ATM now when the person in the pickup truck reversed back instead of pulling the ATM off the wall it pulled the bumper bar off the truck somewhat embarrassed they fled the scene and left their bumper bar tied to the chain which also had their registration plates they were arrested an hour later there are all sorts of partnerships but they usually have a common cause and the cause here in verse 5 is not robbery of course but the gospel the Philippians were in partnership or sharing with Paul in promoting the gospel now how did they do this?

well no doubt they prayed for Paul and for the gospel work but chapter 4 makes it clear that their partnership was primarily financial and so please turn to chapter 4 for a moment chapter 4 and we'll have a look at verse 10 we'll just quickly work our way through the passage that Sue read for us verse 10 he says I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me

now when you first read that you think that Paul is having a go at them you know he's saying about time you finally got your act together but no he means that at last have had an opportunity to send money for the rest of verse 10 says indeed you were concerned for me but had no opportunity to show it you see for some reason the Philippians couldn't get money to Paul but now they can but Paul is very clear he's not asking for the money so he says in verse 11 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 learned 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 you see Paul has learned to trust God in all circumstances and so it's not as though he's begging them for this gift but at the same time he doesn't want to sound ungrateful for their help and so he says in verse 14 in any case it was kind of you to share in my troubles in this way now it's interesting that Paul says that they share or partner him not only in the gospel as we heard in chapter 1 but also in his distress here in verse 14 now does this mean they went to prison and shared in Paul's imprisonment because that's where he was writing the letter from no of course not rather they shared in his distress by giving for that's what they did and continue to do and we see that in verse 15 and following he says you Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church shared 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 that is I seek to commend you for it

I have been paid in full and have even 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 his riches in glory in Christ Jesus to our God and Father be glory forever and ever Amen you see the Philippians gave money to Paul and in so doing shared in his gospel work and even in his distress in other words by giving it put them on the front line of gospel work just like our prayers put us on the front line of gospel work even though it's Paul who was doing the preaching and the suffering through their partnership they were sharing in it you see and as Paul receives this current gift from Epaphroditus he remembers their generosity from the beginning in fact in the beginning they were the only church that joined with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving much to the shame of the other churches and so Paul far from buttering them up for yet another gift wants to commend them for their generosity and can I commend you here at Holy Trinity for your generosity

I know there are many here who give generously there are many here who partner in promoting the gospel you see as you partner us and our many link missionaries you are on the front line of gospel work of seeing Jesus and the message of his salvation go out to many and so again can I thank you of course there is still a need in fact after this service this morning our treasurer Eric Smith will bring us financial update as the vestry has promised to do from time to time and I need to say that this wasn't planned by the way Eric and I didn't get together and say look I'll hit them with the Bible and then you hit them with the facts and figures it wasn't a coordinated attack it's just the way it worked out but we will hear that there is still a need and I want to encourage you if you are not giving to think about how you might give generously knowing that God has given generously to us for it is by giving that all Christians can promote the gospel 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 you see if Jesus is Lord and deserves glory from everyone now if people are in danger without Jesus and if we are to do all we can to seek and save others then does that not include our prayers and our partnership at one of my old churches one of our outreach events was running a soccer clinic that run during the school holidays for most of the day for most of the week and the kids came along and they got some professional coaching we flew in a soccer coach they played games we also looked at the Bible at some simple gospel studies and we had lots of fun now these sorts of things cost money and we also we obviously charged for it and parents were happy to pay that because they pay for other clinics tennis clinics and AFL clinics and so on they were happy to pay for that but we wanted as many children to come as possible and so we wanted to keep the cost as low as possible and so at a meeting we were talking about how much to charge and an older single guy said

[24 : 47] I've got a thousand dollars burning a hole in my wallet here we go I can add that now I'm sure he could have used that thousand dollars elsewhere I'm sure it really wasn't burning a hole in his wallet it wasn't really getting in his way yet he gave it because he was keen to see the gospel go

out and even he even took leave without pay from work to attend the soccer clinic even though he doesn't really like soccer he much prefers cricket now of course the amount is not important but rather it's the attitude isn't it you see if you like he put his money where his mouth was he knew these children were in danger and so he wanted them to be saved and so he promoted the gospel by his financial partnership now I doubt any of what I've said this morning is new to you in fact I was a little concerned that this sermon series wouldn't be meaty enough for people who have been taught the Bible so well for so many years and there is lots more I could say on both prayer and partnership but the thing is we can know all there is to know and unless we act on it then our knowledge is for nothing isn't it we need to act on what we know for we are seeking to promote the good news about Jesus you see it's not any old product that we're seeking to promote we're seeking to promote

Jesus who is a person who came to die for us who did come and die for us rather and rise again that many could be saved and the product we're promoting or the person we're promoting it doesn't last a short time like many products do these days rather Jesus saves people from hell and brings them to heaven and that lasts for eternity and so more than anything else the gospel is worth promoting is it not with our prayers and our partnership let's pray that we would do both let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you that the gospel as your word says is the power of salvation for all who believe and so it is always worth promoting and seeking and seeking to share father we pray therefore that you might help us here this morning to promote your gospel in order to see others saved by praying regularly for them and by partnering with ministry here at Holy Trinity and beyond so that more and more people will hear the good news about Jesus and turn to him in repentance and faith and so bring your name great honour and glory we ask it all in Jesus name Amen we're going to sing a hymn it's hymn number 554 a hymn number and S a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn an hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a hymn a which