

Promoting the Gospel for God's Glory

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Date: 04 June 2006

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[0 : 0 0] In the 1980s, I was not singing the praises of God. However, my wife Cheryl was. Cheryl began to follow Jesus relatively early in our marriage.

Cheryl thought that it was a good idea that Matthew, our oldest son, should attend Sunday school. I thought that was a good idea too, provided that that didn't mean that I was expected to go to church as well.

But the Holy Spirit had other ideas. Looking back to that time, the Spirit clearly impressed on Cheryl the need to encourage me to come along on Sundays with the rest of the family.

I did that sometimes. And when I went to church on a Sunday morning, these were your regular Sunday morning services with communion. They were not special services.

They were not what has been more recently described as seeker services. No, these were services with hymns, Bible readings, a sermon, prayers of thanksgiving and intercession, sometimes a testimony, sometimes a baptism.

[1 : 1 1] And I can remember, as if it was yesterday, literally, thinking to myself, I mean, these people here, they just really seem to love God. I mean, how is it that they so obviously love him and I don't even want to be here?

Why are they so joyful? I mean, I can't ever imagine responding to God in this way. And as well as those sorts of reactions, I was often deeply convicted of my sin, of my lack of relationship with Jesus Christ.

So did that conviction arise from the sermons? Sometimes. But actually, it was during the communion.

It was during the Lord's Supper that I was consistently convicted of my state of spiritual coldness. You see, I found that the words of institution that are spoken at the Lord's Supper and watching people individually and also corporately take the bread and the wine, this was actually a most uncomfortable experience.

Indeed, it was a convicting experience. Why? Well, because the gospel was being powerfully proclaimed in every Lord's Supper by the words spoken and by the participation of Christians.

[2 : 3 6] You see, in this simple but profoundly significant act, declaration by word and sign. And the Holy Spirit in his mercy was convicting me of my sin, of my sinful state, of my need actually to respond to Jesus Christ.

So yes, our regular corporate services, Sunday services, can be used by the Spirit as a powerful proclamation of the gospel to the glory of God.

This morning, we come to the end of our seven-week series entitled Promoting the Gospel. But certainly, we don't come to the end of mission.

Mission continues until Christ returns. And we've been reminded over the last six weeks that promoting the gospel is the privilege, indeed it's the responsibility of every follower of the Lord Jesus.

You see, everyone, without exception in the body of Christ, is gifted to promote the gospel, to be part of God's saving mission, to a world that is literally dead in its sin, to a world under the power of the devil.

[3 : 56] Each of us can reflect God's mission heart. And we are to be promoters of the gospel. And we've seen that we can do that as we see the world through God's eyes, spiritually dead and dark.

We do it as we pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out labourers into the harvest field, into Doncaster, into far-flung places around the globe.

And as we pray to the Lord of the harvest, we pray with an open heart. Because part of the answer to that prayer, indeed, might be us ourselves as we pray.

And we promote the gospel as we contribute financially to gospel ministry, as we show compassion and mercy to those around us that are hurting, that are in great suffering.

And we promote the gospel as we lead godly lives, as our character is displayed in our behaviour and actions.

[5 : 02] We can actually adorn, we can beautify the gospel. It can literally sparkle in our lives. You see, the good lives of believers can enhance the gospel's appearance in the minds of those who hear the gospel.

And last week, we looked at Colossians 4. And we were reminded that the gospel is heard as evangelists stand up and proclaim it. And the gospel is also heard as other Christians who are not gifted as evangelists simply share in a gracious way, in just everyday conversation, the reality of Jesus Christ and his life-transforming gospel.

You might recall, if you were here with us last week, that the Apostle Paul actually elevates conversational answers to the status of missionary activity.

And perhaps if you've been here for some or all of this series, you will have noticed, and even as I've just gone through that summary, that we promote the gospel in a great variety of ways.

I wonder if you've also noticed that we do it both individually and corporately. Can you give me an example of that? We can and we should each individually be prayer warriors for gospel ministry.

[6 : 23] But in addition, we see clearly in the Word of God that God places great importance on corporate prayer when we as the people of God come together in praise and intercession corporately.

And so in that second reading that we had today from 1 Peter 2, we're reminded that when the church comes together just as we are now in corporate worship, we have a great and wonderful opportunity to promote the gospel to the glory of God.

At the beginning of our service today, Dorothy read from us the first few verses of Psalm 96. You see, Psalm 96 declares that the singing of God's praises and your voices are great this morning, the singing of God's praises is a declaration of God's marvellous deeds.

And that's within earshot of those who might come who are outside of the kingdom. And in fact, Psalm 96 invites the Gentiles to come into God's courts and to join in the worship of the one true God.

At the dedication of the first temple, the temple which superseded the tabernacle, King Solomon prayed. And as we look at 1 Kings 8, we see that Israel expected Gentiles to come to Jerusalem and join in Israel's praise.

[7 : 49] And in fact, the temple that was standing in Jesus' time actually had a specific court. It was known as the Court of the Gentiles. One of the purposes of that court was to allow pagans to learn and take part in Israel's public praise of the one true God.

So as we come to our passage in 1 Peter 2, and please turn with me, if you would, in those pew Bibles, 1 Peter 2, page 985. As we come to this little passage, we again see this theme of temple worship and declaring God's praises to the watching and listening world.

Now, the words, the careful words that Peter uses and the Old Testament text that he refers back to and cites, these act by declaring that the Christian community is in fact the new temple ministry.

And so as you go through just from verses 4 to 10, you'll see that temple imagery is really to the fore in that passage. Maybe if you're visiting with us today, as you're concentrating on keeping your hands warm as you drove in, you may have missed the wording on the billboard at the front of the property that simply says this, the Holy Trinity Anglican Church meets here.

That might seem a little bit curious to you because in fact throughout the world more often than not, it's actually the building which is referred to as the church.

[9 : 22] And what magnificent churches there are in St. Paul's and St. Pat's in Melbourne are pretty good, but they kind of fade into near insignificance compared to many of the European architectural delights.

In France, in Rouen, there's a cathedral there which is just magnificent. In Rome, you nearly become blasé to the magnificent basilicas.

And just this week, I was flicking through a travel book and was looking at pictures in the cross-section of the huge Milan cathedral, the Duomo. It's breathtaking.

It started its construction in the late 14th century, wasn't completed until the 19th century, and the marble for the cathedral was transported on barges down canals.

In the Middle Ages, many of the Gothic churches were built in the following way. A quarry site would be established, and often that quarry site would be as much as 80 kilometres away from the construction site.

[10 : 26] And when the rocks were mined, volunteers from all over the country would come, and they'd form a living chain from the quarry to the building site. And the rocks would then be passed from one hand to another hand all the way to the construction ground.

I actually find that vision of a living church helpful. You see, because God's church is not a building. God's church is people.

And the essence of the church is people, living stones. And how wonderfully was that presented to us by Warwick and the kids this morning. Look with me then at verse 5.

Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus Christ. He's the key to the church. He's the focus through whom the whole church comes together. All of the directions, all of the bearings for the church come from Jesus.

[11 : 38] And so you'll see there in verse 6, as Warwick has so clearly already presented this morning. Jesus is described as the cornerstone. The cornerstone, the first stone that's put in place.

And everything takes its line, its cue, its direction, its level from that stone. And I think that's nearly the case here, isn't it?

You probably can't see up the back, but Emma and Tanner and I think is there Candace down the bottom and Hayden and Claire was sort of moved but Claire's over there.

They're all taking their line in the direction from the cornerstone which is Jesus himself. And he's not just the cornerstone, he's the living stone as we read in verse 4.

He's alive from the dead as the risen Lord. So this cornerstone, this living stone, it's set in place despite Jesus' rejection.

[12 : 49] And so Peter has been using words from the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 28, and then he goes on, he quotes directly from Psalm 118 and then also some Old Testament allusions from Psalm 8 as we come to verses 7 and 8.

To you then who believe, he is precious. But to those, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner.

And a stone that makes them stumble and a rock that makes them fall. they stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do.

See, back in verse 4, it says that the living stone was rejected by mortals. Mortals, men and women. And the severity of God's judgment falls not only on the builders who had rejected God's chosen stone in one particular application, the leaders of Israel.

Not only on them, God's judgment falls on all unbelievers. And those who stumble at the word of the gospel are broken in their unbelief.

[14 : 09] They're hard words, aren't they? But we don't need to come under God's judgment. The gospel is a free gift.

And it can be ours through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, notice the beginning of verse 7. To you then who believe he is precious.

Through faith we're brought into Christ's body and it's Christ's body which is the true temple, not a building. And so the imagery that we're seeing here is one of like a growing temple of living stones just as we saw this actually come up graphically before us.

The people of God are a holy temple united to Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone. So the focus in this passage is a corporate one.

It's not an individual one. It's a corporate focus because we're being built into a spiritual house. we read that we're a chosen people.

[15 : 19] And Paul hears utilising language also from the book of Isaiah, Isaiah 43 where it's announced that God himself is Israel's only saviour who will deliver his people from exile in Babylon.

And this language is then picked up by Peter and it's applied to the church. It's applied to us. It's applied to the new covenant community.

because Jesus Christ has achieved a far greater deliverance for God's people. It's the deliverance from spiritual darkness to spiritual light and life.

So we're a chosen people. And Peter says but we're also a royal priesthood. That is, we're mediating God in Christ to the nations. and we're a holy nation.

In fact, we're God's very own possession. And you'll see in those terms of world priesthood a holy nation that Peter is picking up terms that were applied to Israel at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19.

[16 : 28] So, I want you this morning if you can to try and capture the significance of these terms. Chosen people, royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's very own possession.

I want you to try and capture the significance of this. I mean, especially if you're struggling with rejection as a Christian. The rejection can come from family members, can come subtly, sometimes not so subtly from your work colleagues, from many that you come across in day-to-day life.

For a Jewish reader to be part of royalty was beyond one's natural abilities. It was inherited. But the message of the gospel is that by believing in Jesus, we become, we do, we become actually adopted members of the family connected with the King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we too become royalty. Someone was just sharing with me this week that beginning of verse 9 is just so prestigious, isn't it?

It is prestigious that we're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and yet the sad reality is that sometimes we shy away from God's people, we shy away from his church.

[17 : 55] But Christ loves his church. He loves the church so much, indeed, Christ laid down his life for the church. During the last week I caught an interview with two young Australian multi, multi, multi, might be another multi, millionaires.

And the interviewer asked them what were the key factors that they could identify for their success. Well, they sort of rolled out the standard list, you need to be able to identify growth industries, growth sectors, you need to provide better service than your competitors, you need to work hard, et cetera.

But perhaps the defining parameter for both of these business success stories, one was in telecommunications, the other was in health, fruit drinks, the defining parameter in both was passion.

Both of them spoke of how you needed to be totally driven and totally consumed by passion for the business that you're in.

Consumed 24/7, I guess is the modern term. Consuming passion. But this is consuming passion actually for things which are extremely temporal and passing about that quick they can go.

[19 : 24] But for us in God's grace, he's called us into his family. He's appointed us. He's appointed us despite all of our weaknesses, despite all of our failings.

And he's appointed us to be his promoters of the gospel to the world. So let me ask you, is there any greater honor that could be bestowed on us?

I wonder if there was an instrument, something like a passion CT scanner, what would be revealed as we slid into that tunnel?

What would we see and be seen as the passion of our heart? In verse 5, we see that we're called to offer spiritual sacrifices.

This is temple language, isn't it? But this is not taking some animal and slaying it and putting it on an altar. Spiritual sacrifices involve opening our lips, singing God's praises, thanking the Lord together, corporate worship.

[20 : 35] The church, the body of Christ, has been chosen by God. He's established us as a royal priesthood. He's appointed us as a holy nation to be his own possession.

So what then is our purpose as God's own, his chosen ones, his royal priesthood? What is the purpose?

Look then at verse 9 in the second half. The purpose is to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

God's love. The question is this our passion? Do you catch the mission? Do we each see that we're called to this end, to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light?

You see, when we come together in corporate worship as we're doing this morning, the question for me, and can I suggest for each of us, is what is our mindset when we come together?

[21 : 55] What's the state of our hearts? Is it to glorify God, to proclaim his mighty acts? Is it to promote the gospel to those who are outside the kingdom who might be with us for Sunday morning, indeed with us this very morning?

You see, the sad reality is I think it's very easy to slip into one or both of two modes. And the first mode is that mentality, if you like, of self-focus.

And it's expressed in sort of expressions that you might either keep to yourself or share with others, something like, oh, I really didn't get that much out of the service this morning. I don't know, I'm just not sure that this place is really meeting my needs.

The self-focus mode. But there's another mode which is so easy to slip into, and I simply think of that as the mode of adjudication.

You see, of critiquing everything that's done during our time of corporate worship. And for each of us, if we're not careful, we end up critiquing rather than participating with hearts that are focused on our majestic and glorious God.

[23 : 20] So we have to be on our guard. I need to be on my guard, friends. We all need to be on our guard, lest we become highly skilled service critiquers, appraising the musos, the singing, the sermon, those who are leading the prayers, and so on and so forth.

But having said that, let me emphasise that we must always remember that we are worshipping the Lord Almighty.

And as such, our worship is not to be haphazard. It's not to be done in a sort of, well, who cares type of approach. As God's own children, we should do all things in life with a spirit of excellence.

God is worthy of our best. So whatever part we play in corporate worship, when the body comes together, we're to do it unto the Lord.

We're to do it in dependence on the spirit, prayerfully, and having invested time and energy into its preparation. Now I guess as you hear that, you might quickly think, well, that obviously and clearly applies to those with the heavy responsibility of proclaiming God's word, and it does.

[24 : 43] But it no less applies to those who lead the congregation in prayer. And I know in my time at Holy Trinity, coming up to about a year and a half, it's just such a joy, week after week, to be led in prayer by those who have so clearly sought the Lord's guidance in the days leading up to our Sunday service.

So those who preach, those who lead in prayer, should do so having sought the Lord's guidance in the days leading up to the service. But friends, this approach actually applies to all of us.

Let me give you some example of how broad this is, how all-encompassing this approach is. You see, it applies to those who play musical instruments, who lead singing, who read the scriptures, who give kids talks, who welcome those who arrive at the door, who help people to their seats, who look after the young ones out in the crèche, help in the crying room.

And even in that list, have I left anyone out? well, if I have, we are all as God's people, picked up in the second half of verse 9, aren't we?

All of us are included in the second half of that verse. Because all of us, whether we are up front playing a public role in corporate worship, or whether we're not in that public role, the Lord says this, we have a responsibility to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

[26 : 27] Well, what does this look like in practical terms? Just a couple of pointers. We proclaim God's mighty acts as we pray through the week for our time of corporate worship, that God would be glorified in the service, that sinners would come to a point of repentance and come into the kingdom.

As we pray through the week, that every aspect of the service, every aspect of our corporate praise would actually glorify our majestic God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We proclaim the mighty acts of God as we join in enthusiastically, as we've so clearly done this morning in our songs of praise.

prayer. We proclaim the mighty acts of God as we join in in our hearts with those who are leading us in prayer. And perhaps we might even acknowledge our solidarity in those prayers by our expression of agreement.

Amen. And we do proclaim God's mighty acts as we warmly greet those who are around us before the service, during the service, after the service.

[27 : 42] Someone has said, a cold church like cold butter never spreads very well. Well, I'm pleased to say that that little quote does not apply in my experience at Holy Trinity.

And we proclaim the mighty acts of God as we listen to scripture expounded and we listen to it with open hearts. We listen with an eagerness anticipating that God will speak to us individually and corporately because we worship a speaking God.

We worship a God who's in relationship with his people. We don't worship the sermon. So we ought to come together with the expectation that God indeed will speak to us.

God is not going to disappoint us in that. He'll teach us, he'll challenge us, he'll comfort us, and indeed he'll rebuke us as is needed.

And those present who are not in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will know that God's glory is being proclaimed.

[28 : 57] well, if that's the case then, will all who are outside of the kingdom, who may be physically present in our corporate worship times, are they going to fall to their needs, either literally or figuratively in repentance?

Will they do that in repentance before Almighty God? Not all of them. But some will. And we know that there are just probably mind-boggling celebrations in heaven over just one person who turns to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and repentance.

Now, as we declare God's praises to a world in darkness, that may lead to rejection. Indeed, it may lead to hostility. But whether rejection, whether hostility, that's actually as God's people, as his royal priesthood, his chosen race, that's what we're called to do.

So declaring God's praises together in church, through our readings, saying the creed, preaching, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, declaring God's praises together is one of the central purposes of being the people of God.

You see, Peter says this, you have been chosen and don't miss this little word, that, that you may declare the praises of God.

[30 : 31] You see, our time together is actually a missionary activity. And we worship God not to win his favour, but we worship God in response to his marvellous grace, his grace that save us, his grace that has transferred us from a kingdom of darkness and death to the kingdom of light and love and life.

So as we praise our great and merciful God, God takes our worship by his spirit, he convicts and challenges those who are present, who are outside of the kingdom, so that what?

that they too may repent and put their faith in Christ, and then they too become worshippers, so that they are then members of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

Well, friends, over the last seven weeks, God, through his word, has been speaking to us. Individually, as a church, as a ten o'clock congregation.

And God's been speaking to us about the proclamation of his glorious gospel. I know that I've been challenged each week of the series, whether sitting in the pew listening, whether preparing and then delivering a message.

[32 : 08] church. And I want us now to each take a few minutes to respond in the quietness of our hearts to the Holy Spirit.

One level we're doing that individually, but we're also doing it corporately as Christ's body, living stones being built into this growing temple.

So I wonder, you don't need to do this, it might help to avoid distractions, just simply to close your eyes and allow the Holy Spirit to speak into your life, to challenge you, and where he does challenge you to respond to that challenge.

So you might want to just reflect back on what we've covered in the series, the challenge of seeing the world through God's eyes, a world lost and needing salvation, the challenge of praying that the Lord of the harvest would send labourers into the harvest field, the challenge of contributing financially to gospel ministry, of showing compassion, of leading godly lives so that our lives beautify the gospel, the challenge of just simply sharing in gracious ways in everyday conversation, the reality of Christ.

And friends, the challenge of our hearts, our mindset, set as we come and worship together, that we would proclaim to those who come to our services, the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness.

[33 : 46] Let's just take a moment of quiet reflection and response. father, we ask that by your spirit, you would continue to speak to us individually and as your people, your body, your royal priesthood.

Lord, continue to speak into our hearts and may we respond in accordance with your word. And Lord, may we, the Holy Trinity Anglican Church that meets at 106 Church Road, be committed always to the promotion of the gospel.

We ask this for Christ's sake and for his glory. Amen. His name ■■■■■, will increase Him His His