

Why Promote the Gospel? - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Thanks for having me along tonight. It's nice to be with 6pm. This is the cool congregation, isn't it?

The modest one. How about I pray and then we'll get stuck into God's Word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Bible. We thank you that it continues to teach us about who you are and what you have done for us through the Lord Jesus and how it is that we might respond in light of that.

Father, we ask now that you would help me to be faithful and clear to your Word and that you might give us all minds to understand it, but more than that, hearts that would seek to live in light of it. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Some years ago I played squash with an old Bible study leader of mine. In fact, I was actually in his Bible study group at the time and he was a barrister. And at the time he was so unfit that his insurance company said they would no longer insure him.

So he asked me if I wanted to play squash with him because he needed to get fit so he could be insured and get his life insurance back. And so I thought, yeah, I mean, I haven't played much squash before, but how hard can it be? This guy is so unfit, it's going to be easy.

[1 : 12] Now we played squash every week for about a year, about five games each week. So over 200 games I played with him and out of the 200 games I won twice. He was 15 years older than me, so unfit he was about to lose his health insurance and I could only beat him twice.

It was humiliating. It was demoralising. It got to the point where Michelle, my wife, stopped asking me if I won when I got home and started asking me how much I lost by. My lovely wife.

And so the following year when he asked if I wanted to play squash again, well, I wasn't so keen anymore. And I wonder whether this is similar when it comes to talking about Jesus with others.

You see, we can talk about Jesus time and time again, but often be met with weird looks, sometimes even persecution, and often people are simply not interested. And that's after you go through all the effort of praying for opportunities and working up the courage to say something with the heart pounding and everything.

And when you speak, as soon as you mention, you know, church or the Bible and especially the name Jesus, shutters go down. Conversation ends. Conversation ends.

[2 : 50] Heaps. And then I casually added, what about you? Have you ever, you know, given much thought to Jesus? Now, I thought I'd done pretty well. You know, answered his questions and just, you know, very smoothly worked it into the conversation.

I thought it was pretty good. And so I was expecting a good conversation. His response, though, he said this. I need to go to the toilet and walk straight off and avoided me for the rest of our stay.

I kid you not. You see, we don't always win, so to speak. When we try and talk about Jesus or when we pray for people year after year who aren't Christians but seemingly to no avail.

And so like my squash playing days, it can be very demoralizing, disheartening to the point where we don't want to play next year. We don't want to keep speaking about Jesus as much as we once did. So why keep going?

Well, over the next four weeks, we're going to be doing a topical sermon series entitled Promoting the Gospel. I fleeced the topic from John Dixon from this book. And I've fleeced some ideas as well.

[3 : 52] When there's good and godly exegesis, that is, good and godly expounding of the text, we don't have to reinvent it and suddenly become, you know, a novel. I'm unashamedly saying I've pinched some stuff from him.

I don't agree with everything he says, however, but it's still a good book to read. And so what I'd like to do this week and next week is talk about why, why bother promoting the gospel. And in the third and fourth weeks, talk about how, how are we to promote the gospel?

Should we, for example, go down to a shopping town on a Saturday morning and talk to people, walk up to people and say, have you ever thought about Jesus or something like that? Is that what we as Christians should all be doing?

For now, for tonight, I want to be looking at the question of why. And I don't want to spend too much tonight. It'll be a slightly shorter sermon. But I do want us to get us thinking about the why question.

So if I asked you why promote the gospel of Jesus, what would you say? In fact, why not turn to the person next to you to see what they would say?

[4 : 56] So here's 30 seconds. This is a crowd participation moment. Yes, you have to do something. Turn to the person next to you and talk about why we should promote the gospel.

30 seconds now. Okay, that's enough. Now, I won't get you to call out because, you know, that's going a bit further than a crowd participation moment.

I don't want to embarrass anyone. But I'm assuming you came up with the standard answers. But I wonder, without looking at your outline that's in your bulletin, which one you'd say is the most fundamental?

And given by that laughing, considering that some of you have looked at the outline, I wonder whether you would need to be reminded of the fundamental reason about why we need to keep talking about Jesus and doing what we can to promote the gospel.

And so what is this fundamental reason? Well, point one, because God is God. We see this from the Old Testament reading from Psalm 96. So please turn to Psalm 96.

[5 : 56] It's page 479 in your black Bibles. It would be really great if you could follow along. This psalm is a reasonably well-known psalm.

It was turned into a song some years ago. And verse 1 seems to be the psalmist's vision for the whole earth. Verse 1 says, Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord all the earth.

This is the psalmist's vision. That the whole earth would sing to the Lord. And I take it that's why it's a new song. Because it's no longer just Israel singing praises to the Lord.

But it's the whole earth. But how will this happen? Well, verse 2 and 3. Sing to the Lord, bless his name. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations.

His marvellous works among all the peoples. Here the focus seems to change from the whole earth to Israel. For they are to bless or praise God's name.

[6 : 59] And tell of his deeds among the nations. Among the Gentiles. The interesting thing here is that the word for declare in verse 2. Is the same word for evangelize.

To announce the gospel. Or proclaim the good news. That is, the Israelites were to evangelize. Or proclaim God's salvation day by day. And declare his glory among the nations.

So that the whole earth would sing to God. But why? Why should the whole earth sing to God in the first place? Well, verse 4 and 5.

And here's our fundamental reason. Verse 4. For or because God is for great is the Lord. And greatly to be praised. He is to be revered above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols. But the Lord made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before him. Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

[7 : 58] You see, the reason the Israelites were to proclaim God among the peoples. Is because God is God. And therefore he deserves to be praised. Verse 4.

And he is worthy of praise. Because he is the one true God. Who made the heavens. And us for that matter. The idols are nothing. It says. They are worthless. In fact, the word for idol actually means worthless.

And so verse 5. Could actually be translated as. For the gods of the nations are worthless. They're not the true God. In other words. But the Lord, on the other hand. Well, he is. The true God of all people.

Whether they like it or not. And so we are to declare God to the nations. So that they might treat God as God. Because that's who he is. In fact, that's what the psalm tells all the nations to do.

In verses 7 to 9. It says. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Or the nations. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe or give to the Lord the glory due his name.

[9 : 00] Bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in holy splendor. Tremble before him all the earth. It's as though the psalmist is saying. Hey, all you nations.

Make sure you give God what he deserves. Ascribe to him or say of him what is true. And give him the glory due his name. Stop singing to your old idols.

And start singing a new song. A song to the true God. For that is who he is. Do you see the logic here? Because God is the true God. Then the Israelites would declare it as such.

Within the ears of the nations. So that they might hear. And give God the glory he deserves. I was driving with my family one afternoon. And we pulled up at a set of traffic lights.

And then a police car pulled up next to us in the other lane. And at this stage the kids weren't in a particularly good mood. And one of them had recently been in the habit of sticking her tongue out at people.

[9 : 57] Yeah, you can guess what happened, can't you? And so when the police officer turned and smiled and waved at my lovely daughter. Mmm. Now luckily the police officer simply laughed.

And you know, very, and we were very quickly. And we very quickly rather explained to my daughter that you don't be rude to those people in particular. You know, she had to give the honour and respect to this police officer for that is who they were, you see.

Now God is not a police officer of course, but he is the loving creator of all people. And so all people are to worship him as God. As their God. For that is who he is. You see the logic?

And we see the same logic when it comes to Jesus. We have to promote the gospel of Jesus because of who he is, which is point two. And here we come to our second reading. So please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 28.

Page 811. This chapter begins with the resurrection of Jesus. And in verses 2 and 3, an angel of the Lord appears, rolls the stone away and scares the guards stiff.

[11 : 10] Presumably they then run back into the city before the women appear in verse 5. And when the women do appear, the angel says this. So let's pick it up at verse 5.

But the angel said to the women, Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised.

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

There you will see him. This is my message for you. So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples.

It's interesting here that the women leave not just with great joy but also fear. Did you notice that? Why fear? I mean their beloved leader is back from the dead.

[12 : 06] That's exciting stuff. And so I get the joy, the great joy part. But why the fear? In fact, in the end of Mark's gospel when it talks about the resurrection, that's the only thing Mark mentions is that the women left bewildered and trembling with fear.

It doesn't even mention joy. So why the fear? Well, I think because of two reasons. First, these women knew their Old Testaments. And their Old Testament like Daniel chapter 12 where resurrection signals judgment.

Resurrection signaled the judgment day. And so God raising Jesus from the dead signals that Jesus will judge all people. But not yet, of course.

And so that would have brought on a bit of fear, judgment. Secondly, though, the women's fear is an appropriate response, I think, because that's the response people have whenever they recognize who Jesus is.

In Mark's gospel, for example, whenever people glimpse Jesus' divinity, his God-likeness, they are afraid. Do you remember the disciples on the boat where Jesus calms the storm?

[13 : 10] Jesus says, quiet, be still, the storm's calm. And then after the storm is calm, it says the disciples were terrified. Not of the storm, it's calm now. They're terrified of Jesus.

For they have glimpsed something of Jesus' God-likeness, his divinity. Now, why am I telling you all this?

Well, because the resurrection we read about here signals that Jesus is not just the king who will judge all people, but he is God, the Son himself. In other words, the resurrection shows us that he is Lord of heaven and earth, the one who has been given all authority.

And that's exactly what Jesus goes on to say. So let's pick it up over the page at verse number 16. Just over the page, verse number 16. Now, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[14 : 17] Here the disciples meet Jesus before he ascends into heaven. And note that some of the Jewish disciples worship him. Now, all the Jews believed there was only one God. That's what made them so different to the nations around them.

And so for a Jew to worship Jesus was essentially to call him God. You see, in the light of resurrection, they now recognize Jesus is more than just a man and more than just a chosen king. In some way, he is God, the Son himself.

Though we're told also that some doubted. I love that phrase, by the way. Some doubted. And I love that phrase because it shows us what we have here is actually what happened in history.

I mean, if the disciples were making this up and wanted people to believe them, would they have really included the fact that some of them doubted? I doubted. Sorry about the pun. They wouldn't have put that in there.

It shows us that it is real, that what we're reading is really history. That's an aside. But the thing to note here is that in verse 18, Jesus says that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

[15 : 19] And because he has all authority, because he is the Lord of all, then verse 19, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you, he says.

You see what Jesus is saying here? He says, because I am the Lord of all nations, therefore go and make disciples of all nations. In other words, since Jesus has authority over all people, then all people ought to worship him as their Lord.

That's who he is. You see, we're to promote the gospel so that everyone would treat Jesus as Lord, for that is who he is. It was our son's birthday a couple of weeks ago, and because he was the birthday boy, he got to choose what he would have for lunch.

Now, he used to say things like fairy bread and things like that, which was fine by me. It was nice and cheap. Not that I'm a cheapskate, necessarily. But then, when it was his birthday, he said, I want to go to a restaurant.

So we took him to La Paquetta, the cheap restaurant. And what's more, he got some presents, and we sang happy birthday, and so on.

[16 : 37] Now, why do we do all this? Why did he get to choose where he went for lunch? And why do we sing happy birthday, and so on and so on? Well, because of who he was on that day. He was the birthday boy, and so we treated him in light of who he was.

Of course, Jesus is no birthday boy. He's the loving Lord who died for all, who was raised and given authority over all people, not just on that day, but every day.

And so all people are to treat him as Lord. And that's why we're to promote the gospel, so that people might respond and treat Jesus as he deserves.

And to promote the gospel ultimately means to make disciples. That's the main command in verse 19 in the original language. It's not, the main command is not go. The main command is to make disciples.

And we make them by going, baptizing, and teaching. Now, going, of course, doesn't mean you have to go overseas or anything like that. But it's certainly proactive.

[17 : 31] In the Old Testament, Israel was mainly reactive. You know, people came to them like Rahab or Ruth or the Egyptians who came out of Egypt with Israel. And so there is a shift, I think, between Old Testament and New Testament.

We had to go, whether it's just to our neighbor or whatever. And we had to be proactive in looking for opportunities to try and make disciples. And then it says we had to do what we can to baptize, which I think is another way of saying convert.

Convert people. If you were here at our AGM last year, who goes to an AGM from here? The young ones? Oh, my apologies.

Okay. Well, if you were here at the AGM last year, I suggested that baptism refers not so much to water baptism, but to conversion. That is, being immersed into God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by becoming a Christian.

In fact, I think Andrew Reid holds a similar position. I think he mentioned it at the beginning of this year, actually. And there are a number of reasons for this, like the fact that Paul seems not to care much about baptism in 1 Corinthians, for example.

[18 : 38] He says, look, I've only come to preach Christ. I'm glad I didn't baptize many people. And also, you become a disciple by firstly being converted and not by being baptized. And so we have to go and convert by preaching the gospel, in other words.

That's how we make disciples. And then we have to teach them everything Jesus has commanded us. This is what it means to promote the gospel. There are other things we can do as well to promote the gospel, which we'll consider in the coming weeks.

But it certainly means doing what we can to go convert and teach. So does that mean, then, we should go to shopping town and start preaching the gospel?

Outside Coles or Woolies or whatever it is. Well, keep coming back as we continue to look at the why and the how of promoting the gospel. But however it works out for us in each of our daily lives, the comforting thing to remember is the end of verse 20.

Do you see there? At the end of verse 20, Jesus says, And remember, I am with you always to the very end of the age. You see, this Jesus who has all authority, this same Jesus is with us always to the end of the age.

[19 : 49] And so we're not alone in this task of promoting the gospel and making disciples. But for tonight, all I want to do is remind you about this fundamental reason why we promote the gospel.

And that reason is that there is only one true God and only one true Lord of all people. And so all people are to worship him and him alone. So it doesn't matter if you are here tonight and you believe in Jesus or not.

He is your Lord either way. And so what are you doing with the Lord who died for you? If you don't believe in Jesus, then the first thing you need to do is believe in him.

Put your trust in him. Trust him to save you from that judgment day that will come, that the resurrection signaled. And if you already believe, as I know many of you do, then that's terrific.

And we're to continue treating him as Lord in our lives, seeking to please him above all else, even ourselves in our own comfort. But that also means seeking to see everyone else saved, that they might treat Jesus as Lord too.

[20 : 57] You see, we are to promote the gospel not just for the sake of the person who doesn't believe. Sorry, we are to promote the gospel not just for the sake of the person who doesn't believe, but first and foremost for Jesus' sake.

See, often when you think, why should I promote the gospel? We think, well, to see people saved. But first and foremost, it's so that people will treat Jesus as he deserves.

And so if I see Michelle's uncle again, I could just smile and not bother looking for an opportunity to talk. I don't want to send him to the toilet again. But I will take the opportunity.

I will try and talk to him about Jesus again, gently and with respect. Not ultimately, though, for his sake, but ultimately for Jesus' sake. That Michelle's uncle might treat Jesus as Lord, because that is who he is.

Let's pray. Now, gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for Jesus. And we thank you for his death and resurrection.

[22 : 05] And we thank you that by his resurrection, he is declared to be King and God, the Son himself. That he is Lord of all people.

Has authority over heaven and earth. Therefore, in light of who he is, we ask that you would help us do what we can to see other people treat him as Lord.

For that is who he is. We ask it for his sake. Amen. I think we're going to sing again.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[23 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen.