

Sharing the Gospel as Good News (2)

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[0 : 00] Okay, team, this morning we will address the gospel as good news.

And last week we explored together the fount and the pulse of witness bearing. What are its originating springs and its sustaining energies in the life of the believer?

And this morning we turn to the message itself. What is the gospel that we witness bearers bear?

And to this we might rightly answer that the gospel is good news. That's what the word in Greek, gospel, evangelion, actually means, good news.

And that's a good place to start and yields some vitally important insights. Let's consider first, what is the significance of the gospel being news?

[1 : 02] News. Now, news is something noteworthy that we announce. Man lands on the moon. Brazil wins the World Cup a fifth time.

A woman gives birth to nine. Actually, this happened in Morocco a couple years ago. Unbelievable. Nine live births. So, it is something noteworthy that has happened and we herald it.

And the term gospel adopted by the evangelists, the gospel writers, was drawn from the contemporary context of a public declaration, perhaps of the birth of the king or an emperor or the declaration of a decisive victory in war.

Like Pheidippides, who ran from Marathon to Athens, that 26.2 mile stretch to deliver the news of victory over the Persians, announced, Nicomen, we win.

We win. We win. And the term vividly communicates that the gospel is first and foremost a declaration, not first a summons for us to exert ourselves.

[2 : 18] First, it's a declaration of what has been accomplished. It is, in the case of the gospel, an announcement of the great victory that God has accomplished for his people in Christ.

A declaration of what he has done, not first what we must do. And here we might clarify news in contrast with directive.

A directive. So, news. The herald comes from the field of battle and announces, A great victory over the enemy has been accomplished.

Live in the joy and peace of this great new reality. So, there's news. Well, if there were no decisive victory that had been attained and the enemy is on the way to the city, okay, the herald would show up and what you need to do is, he'd give them a directive, okay?

Strengthen the gate. Position the archers on the battlements. Secure your stores of food and water. Fight with all your might for your lives. This sort of thing is a directive, okay?

[3 : 37] Do you see the difference there? This is vitally important. And what God has achieved as distinct from what we must do is the vital differentiation between grace, that is, which by implication means God saves.

God is the one who saves. As it says in Jonah, salvation is of God. And works. That is, somewhere or another, we save ourselves.

Sometimes this distinction is expressed in the contrast of grace versus law. Law, again, the directive, do this. Do this and live.

Okay? As Martin Luther put it, the law says do this, and it is never done. Grace says, believe in this man, and everything is already done.

So the gospel is a message about the grace of God. As the apostle writes in Colossians, this is Colossians 1.6, it says, The gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

[5 : 12] So notice, the gospel, what is that? It's when you, you got the gospel, when you understood the grace of God in truth. It's interesting, the Greek on this, not quite sure if it's an

adjective or an adverb.

If you understood the gospel in all of its truth extensively, or if you truly understood the gospel in its depth, so both extent and depth could be rendered either way.

But this is to say that to get the gospel is to grasp the grace of God. To get the gospel is to grasp the grace of God.

I wonder if you found in your efforts to get grace across that it's often really difficult for people to grasp. Why do you think this might be so?

Non-rhetorical. Why is it so difficult for people to grasp this notion of grace?

[6 : 14] Any thoughts? It's very antithetical to worldliness. Say a little bit more, David, yeah.

Worldliness being... In the world, it's a lot of expectations.

You have to deal with consequences where people are not as forgiving as the grace that's present in the gospel. People aren't used to that. Yeah, that seems right to me.

I mean, think of the environment that we are in just by being in the world. As soon as we spring from the womb, we begin to notice as we're putting the world together that there seems to be an unbreakable correlation between the praise we receive and what we have accomplished for ourselves.

Good grief. I'm a believer. I know about grace. But even I, I've just had a grandson that's born. And it's unbelievable to watch this guy. A year and a half, maybe now.

And as soon as he does something in any way noteworthy or even trivially spectacular, he'll immediately look around to make sure that someone has seen him.

[7 : 21] And then in case they haven't started to clap themselves, he'll actually start to prompt them solicitatingly. Yeah. Just hungry for that. Because he sees that connection.

And I'm sure the travesty is occasionally, I'll reinforce this. As soon as he does something, he starts to take a step or two, and I'll say, great job, great job.

Just reinforcing this. And then on it goes. And on it goes. Everything seems, it's almost like a titanium alloy, tungsten reinforced correlation between these two things.

It is my accomplishment that will gain my acceptance. It is my achievement that will gain praise.

And so it is, you know, you win the race, you get the reward.

Again and again. So everything, as David says, everything in the world seems to reinforce this impression that when it comes to acceptance, acceptability, praiseworthiness, it pivots entirely upon our accomplishment, what we have achieved.

[8 : 37] We are valued for our performance. The culturally reinforced presumption is that what must commend us is our accomplishments. So that makes it really hard to get grace.

It's cutting against the grain of all the cultural sensibilities and enactments. Any other thoughts? Why?

Yeah, yeah, Richard. Yeah. It's too good to be true. And that being the case, probably isn't true.

Yeah, that's great.

And haven't we cultivated an incredible capacity for suspicion? You know, yeah, people are trying to scam us at all kinds of things. Yeah, so it just seems that can't be.

You know, the Bible takes up that theme in a few places too, where it worries that we will never be able to receive this announcement of how good the gospel is without it continuing to reinforce that and give us every assurance that this is in fact what God is telling us.

[9 : 54] I, God, who cannot lie, notwithstanding, will take an oath to reassure you this is going to be true. Even though I wouldn't need an oath to keep me from lying, I'm doing it for your sake because you just won't believe it otherwise.

It's too fantastic. Yeah. Ivor, did you have a comment? Or Susan? Yeah. I'm only focusing on the difficulty in believing grace or the news. Great. I think just the grace part of it, that the news is grace. That this is something. Yeah, yeah, no, we'll get to that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, no, no. Hopefully we can get to that. Yeah, yeah. So, well, yeah.

And this sort of, and again, even other sort of religious backgrounds. Oh, yeah, yeah, Christianity, that's a religion thing. Yeah, I know religions. You know, because it's upon this rock that all religions of the world take their stand with unvarian consistency, including sometimes a lot of encounters that they have had with Christianity that actually appears this way, that we're only accepted based upon our accomplishments and achievements.

How well are we living out the Ten Commandments? This sort of thing. Yeah. When people hear the gospel then, they naturally try to assimilate it into this framework.

[11:16] But it can't fit this framework. It explodes it. It's just like if you were to try to put new wine in old wineskins. If we assimilate the gospel message into our conventional, instinctual religion, we modulate it into our own thoughts and so denature the gospel that we lose it completely.

As God tells us in Isaiah 55, 8 and 9, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

It's interesting that the context of that verse, too, is grace. Come all ye that are thirsty and drink. Buy bread who have no money.

So the context of my thoughts are higher is in the context of grace, talking about grace. Here's a second reason that occurs to me why we're so resistant to the gospel.

[12:29] is that, have you noticed how much the gospel wounds our pride? Just wounds our pride. Fatally, in fact, fatally wounds our pride.

For the gospel is all of grace and allows us nothing, nothing of self-contribution. As Spurgeon says, if we add a single stitch to our garment of righteousness ourselves, the whole fabric unravels.

Just unravels. Or several times in the Old Testament, it indicates that the stones that were to be, the altar was to be made of in the temple.

The stones of the altar in the temple were permitted to have no human tool ever touch them. Or any human artifice come near those stones in any way.

Nothing of human artifice be part of this sacrifice on the stones. This is interesting. Check it out.

Exodus 20, 25. Deuteronomy 27, 5 and 6.

[13:45] Joshua 8, 31. Again and again. It makes this point. Again and again. So, oh, come on. Does grace not leave any place for self-contribution?

And so self-congratulation? Not even just a little private boast for us to cherish in our hearts? Just a tiny one? Our flesh will fight to the death to preserve this prerogative.

And what would we expect of the flesh to do? Because if the gospel alternative shapes it, it is the death of the flesh.

So of course it's going to fight to the death. Because if the gospel prevails, it dies anyway. So what the heck? I might as well die trying to preserve myself. I'm going to die if I receive the gospel. My flesh will.

There's no alternative to death. But we cannot both receive the gospel and keep our pride and self-congratulation.

[14:50] They're just reciprocally excluding. They're mutually exclusive. Can't do it. As we read in 1 Corinthians 1, 28 and 29, but God chose what is foolish to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak to shame the strong so that no flesh may boast in the presence of God. That's the all-governing premise.

No flesh may boast in the presence of God. Now naturally, the fleshly reaction to grace is, this is a hard saying. Who can receive it?

On such conditions, how is grasping the grace of the gospel salvation? Even possible. Even possible.

We might be forgiven for saying with the disciples, who then can be saved? But Jesus looked at them and said, yeah, you're right. With man, these things are impossible.

[15:52] But with God, all things are possible. It takes grace to appropriate grace, to receive grace. It takes grace to receive grace.

That's why we say, it's all of grace. Paul writes, it was by his doing, graciously, that you were even in Christ, in this position of grace.

So, the gospel is news. That is, it declares what God has done in Christ. It is all of grace.

The gospel news is also good news. It's good news. It's good news objectively, that good in and of itself, whatever our perceptions.

It's good objectively. To lay hold of Christ, Paul says, is to possess all things. He is heir of all things. So, if we are in Christ, if we're united with Christ, we are heir of all things.

[17:00] Objectively, superlative, fantastic. But, it is also good news subjectively. That is to say, it can be heard and received as good news.

And this will be true for those appointed to life in whose hearts the Spirit has worked to receive the word with gladness.

To such, the gospel is, to use a phrase of Paul's in 2 Corinthians 2.14, a fragrance of life to life. Just, it just, it, we experience this as a life-giving fragrance that indeed leads us to life, spiritual life, a fragrance of life to life.

And we're gonna, we're gonna focus on this subjective reception by asking the question, how may we communicate the good news of the gospel such that it might be heard as good news?

Okay, so that's what we want to do. So, how do we get the gospel to be more readily heard as good news?

[18:25] Well, it's helpful to recognize that all gospel presentations present Jesus as the answer to a question. Jesus is the answer to a question.

Drawing from titles of tracts, these little evangelistic tracts that I've encountered in my lifetime, Jesus might be offered as the answer to such questions as, how can I find peace with God? That was the title of one. Or another, how may I know God personally? Or, how may I find power for living?

Or, how can I know I will go to heaven when I die? Okay, so, always Jesus an answer to a question. But, if I, the witness bearer, have all the goodwill, and all the zeal, and all the sincerity imaginable, it's still very hard to get someone's sustained attention if I'm offering Jesus as an answer to a question that they are neither asking themselves or can identify with if I ask it for them.

You see? In such cases, my witness strikes them as irrelevant as it fails to connect with any of their felt concerns. I'm giving them an answer to a question they're not asking.

[19:59] And even if I ask it myself for them, if they can't identify with it, not much hope for a connection there. I wonder if you've ever felt in your gospel conversations as though you were setting forth Jesus as the solution to a problem that your hearers didn't feel like they had.

You're telling them how they might be justified by God and not even quite sure what that term means. It's not as if they have any sense of being alienated from God or maybe God's not even on their map.

It's just not even in their address book in their phones. It just doesn't connect at all. Or maybe a resolution to an aspiration.

Jesus is the resolution to this aspiration but they've never felt that aspiration with any poignancy at all. Or maybe they'd be utter strangers to that aspiration.

Don't you want to go to heaven when you die? I've never thought about what's heaven. I've never thought about it. Don't have that aspiration at all.

[21:21] It's easy to experience something like this and to get frustrated. And I've found it can be more effectually engaging if we can offer the gospel as the answer to a question that they are asking.

And we have a good example of this from Paul in Athens. So if you have your Bibles or your phones with you, you might want to look at Acts 17. Acts 17.

First half he's in Thessalonica in the synagogue and the second half he's at Athens. So just find the little section that says Paul in Athens. Okay? And he has recently been in Thessalonica, that's the beginning of Acts 17, sharing the gospel in a Jewish synagogue setting.

And Paul would have been quite accustomed to such a Jewish context, the synagogue in Thessalonica, and no doubt he had developed a very sophisticated way to argue from the scriptures as to the identity of the Messiah.

And if you look at verse 2 and 3 in chapter 17, you'll notice that's just what he was doing. But, as familiar and well honed as his argument was, repeated as often as it had been in the synagogue setting, he can't simply show up in Athens and press play on that Jewish method, that message.

[22:59] You know, imagine, shows up in Athens, men of Athens, let's take up the burning question of the Messiah. Now, as you well know, in Psalm 110, be a complete non-starter.

I mean, why couldn't he do that? Why couldn't he do that? Thoughts? Non-rhetorical. What's Psalm 110? Yeah, what's Psalm 110? Yeah, what is that?

The Messiah? You know, in Greek, it's just the smeared one. What is he smeared with? Did he fall in a puddle? You know, yeah, exactly. Absolute incomprehension. Yeah, would they have been interested in that concern?

Yeah, unimaginable. Isn't that like a, isn't that like a Jewish obsession? Yeah. Paul's, Paul's hearers in Athens are so distant from a gospel framework that on their first hearing, if you, if you look at like verse 18, it seems like when he was, began to speak about Jesus and the resurrection, they, they would have heard it in Greek, Jesus and Anastasis, which sometimes was a, was a, was a name. They probably thought, putting it in their framework, that he was talking about the Jesus and Anastasia like two deities.

[24 : 28] In Greek, you'd often have double deities. You'd have one deity and then the consort and the two deities would come together. And that seems to be what they understood him first. Verse 18, notice, he seems to be speaking about strange deities, plural.

At least, this is what Chrysostom thought in his commentary on this. Complete incomprehension. So, no, the apostle can't just do what he's used to.

He has to change his approach. And he does. He changes his approach. So, let's ask first, what does he do? And then second, we'll ask, how did he get there?

Okay, so first, what does he do? Anybody remember from the story? How does he manage to engage them? How does he manage, what does he do to begin to get a conversation with them that actually gets in gear with them?

He starts from creation and world to build. Yeah, yeah, he goes back, he finds something that they have in common. Do you remember what he found that sparked his conversation?

[25 : 42] Anybody remember what he found? Yeah, yeah, that's right. Yeah, Amanda, he says, I was walking through your territory and I saw this altar with the inscription on it, to the unknown God.

So, he's found something that they actually care about. And he starts with that. he translates the gospel into the terms of something that they care about.

He gives the gospel as an answer to their question, to the unknown God altar. He connects the gospel to their cultural interest in having a comprehensive catalog of all the gods.

and this was something very important to them. Because if you left out one of the gods, these gods were peevish and they could be vindictive.

And they might, you know, strike you with a thunderbolt. Or they might keep you from blessings that you might otherwise have if you named them appropriately and, you know, disemboweled your birds and gave them some sweet-smelling aroma.

[27 : 06] Otherwise, if not, if we don't get all the gods and we miss one out, who knows that we might not drown by shipwreck in the next ship voyage that we take.

Who knows whether our new wife or our new field that we bought will not be fertile unless we manage to get all the appropriate offerings.

So this was something that was exceedingly important to them. In fact, so as to make sure they didn't miss, they had an altar to an unknown God. We're sure you're out there somewhere, we just don't know your name yet, but we're covering our bases.

It's something that they care about. Wow, that's pretty creative, Paul. How did you come up with that?

How did he? How did he know about that? Did he just read encyclopedias a lot when he was a little boy? How did he come up with this? Non-rhetorical.

[28 : 06] How did Paul come up with that? Any thoughts? Just concretely. Yeah?

Absolutely, yeah, look at that. As I passed along, I was observing, verse 23, I think it's 23, 23. Yeah, I was observing. See, he's going around and he's there, he's in this new culture and he's just observing.

His antenna are up. He's starting to take in all this information. What do these people care about? What's important to them? Where might I have a place where I could start a conversation on some sort of question that they're asking?

What are they asking about? See, he's looking for those things. He's making all these, he's like a cultural anthropologist for the gospel.

Looking to see what do they care about. And it's not just a matter of observation too, he's also engaging them in conversations.

[29 : 20] That can be a helpful way too. Notice in verse 18, he's going into the marketplace, the marketplace there, that's the agora, kind of functioned as like the watering hole, everybody shows up to talk about this, that, and everything, sell their wares, hawk stuff, sell art, sculpture, people wanted to find a job, they'd go down there, where'd you go to get hired?

It's where everything went on, the best place to observe what this culture cares about, what interest them, and that's where he starts conversations to find these things out.

And he's not just engaged, he also seems engaging too. Notice verse 20, it says, he brought strange things to their ears, strange things to their ears.

I believe strange, not in the sense of just weird, rather maybe in the sense of Sherlock Holmes to Watson. strange, Watson, isn't this strange?

There's something to this. In other words, salty, flavorful, something that's really interesting and engaging.

[30 : 38] the apostle uses this word in Colossians 4, 6, where he talks about, hey, believers, let's make our speech when we engage with unbelievers really salty, really salty, Colossians 4, 6.

What does he mean by salty? Make it flavorful. Make it flavorful. Yeah, yeah. Have you ever found yourself among really salty conversationalists?

What's that like? What makes a conversation salty, flavorful? Any thoughts? Interesting, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Oh, wow, this is interesting. Sometimes I'm embarrassed to say, sometimes I'm like in some sort of crowded situation, I'm in a conversation with like utterly unsalted interlocutors or whatever, you know, but my ear catches something salty, and then half of my brain is kind of listening in on this other column, because it's just really flavorful and interesting, and this is something that can be so helpful.

You're just drawn to that, aren't you? It says of Jesus, I can't remember where, that the crowd loved to hear him, loved to hear him, so they crowd around, and you look at some of these sayings, it's in the context of saying, hey, well, you know, this is interesting, have you ever thought about this?

[32 : 13] Psalm says, hey, my Lord says, my Lord said to his Lord, sit at thy right hand, who, wait, how do you solve that? We've got a paradox here, who's he talking about, what do you think?

Anybody have thoughts out there? Salty, suddenly there's a crowd, he's in the temple, you know, some of you, oh boy, those boring Pharisees, oh no, no, they're walking over to Jesus, oh, there's going to be an encounter, Jesus is salty, let's, can't wait to hear how this interaction is going to go, so we want to, we want to, we want to try to be salty and flavorful in our encounters with unbelievers, and let's, let's zoom in a little bit and, and be curious about the topic that Paul selected, you know, that Amanda identified, this altar to an unknown God, okay, and, so, what might have made this a really promising choice for a topic to wrap the gospel around?

how would he have been able to hope, you know what, I bet you this one's going to connect with him, what might have been some of the features about that particular topic that would have made it perhaps very promising an effort in, in regard to the Athenian culture broadly, any thoughts?

yeah, there was an inscription there, so that would have been something that he could have referred to concretely, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, was it, was, was that something a little eccentric, you know, what if, what if he would have, would have tied it to some sort of strange little topic that would have been in one of these little vendors booths where nobody's buying anything anyway, you know, the little, I don't know, little carvings of one particular strange thing that nobody wanted, well, I'll connect it to that, obviously, this is very popular, not, yeah, it's unknown, excellent, to the unknown God, in other words, he connects it to something that they have acknowledged questions about, yeah, and then they have interest, there you go, excellent, yeah, there's a good thing, if we, again, he knew that it was their question because he's unknown, we wish we did know, we have a question about this, so yeah, what are, yeah, that's a great one, what about its pervasiveness, it reflected, this concern, this interest, reflected no eccentric pocket, not like, you know, the little vendor that was trying to sell, who knows what, burnt pancakes and nobody cared, nobody was interested at all, no, no, no, no, no, it says the city, verse 16, was full of idols, full of idols, this is something that's really pervasive, in the

Baedeker of those days, they actually had these tour books and they said, Athens, you can't miss Athens, it's an amazing city, there are more idols than there are people, so this is something really, really pervasive, so yeah, we have good, yeah, yeah, I have an idea of that, but not coming home to Jesus and he got so interested he became a follower of us, you know, left, that means yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, right, right, right, right, that's right, that's right, that's right, very much, yeah, and this, and it wasn't a matter of tepid interest, just slender interest, slight interest, no, this engaged their passions intensely, there was an intensity to their passions about this, notice how

[36 : 35] Paul observed that they were very religious in all respects, verse 22, okay, find something for which the person is very intensely interested, or passionate about, and that's likely to be a more interesting conversation, more interesting one, and the, and particularly too, there's something about, he ties it to their objects of worship, worship, when you can find out what a person worships, and by worship, our worship, the word worship comes from worth, what is it that this person ascribes supreme worth, or weightiness to, if you can connect up with that, you will have yourself a really good and deep conversation, because people care about nothing more than what they worship, whatever that might be, love, yes, yes, your, your, your most intense, your supreme love, what you ascribe maximum worth to, and weightiness to, that's, that's the table in the middle of the dance floor that you're going to bump into all the time, okay, so these, these, such characteristics would indicate a promising place for engagement, so when we go around, you know, as our cultural anthropologist for the gospel, looking for, looking for doors for the gospel, we want to look for things where, for the gospel message, and we should be particularly attentive to matters that are pervasive, remember, idols everywhere, prominent, passion laden, puzzling, and prized.

so, and it has some of those characteristics, that's probably a real promising place to connect the gospel to, and if we fail to connect the gospel to issues that matter most to our hearers, we will inevitably and fatally reinforce the sense that they probably already have of the utter irrelevance of our message.

Most people already think that, what possible relevance could this have to me? And if we don't connect it to things that they care about in their life, it'll just reinforce that.

Yeah, that's what I thought. You know, what, they wanted me to have a conversation about the atoning blood of a Nazarene carpenter? Huh? So, let's ask briefly, let's ask briefly, yeah, yeah, yeah, Richard.

It seems this would, on the part of us, the part of the witness bearers, right? It seems this would take some hard imagining to make the connections, especially with our pre-existing Christian mindset.

[40 : 00] Yes, yes. So, well, I'm sure. No, no, no, no, no, go ahead. How do you do this? How do we get this? And that's exactly where I want to go.

What would encourage us? Because I do think this takes some attention and care. And one of the things, we started with our motives, and one of them is love of neighbor.

neighbor, and I think that this flows most naturally out of love of neighbor, where I genuinely care about this person. What do they care about? Let me discern, and I'm going to adapt my language and my approach to this person because I want to have a conversation in the same way that I do with my wife.

You know, well, let me translate this into some sort of vernacular that will allow us. Let me accommodate them. So, in one sense, Paul has connected it to these, he's speaking to a crowd, so he has to pick things that are kind of broadly, these broad cultural aspirations, kind of collective aspirations, to that culture.

Now, of course, we all as individuals inhabit our own microcultures. So if you're having a conversation with one person, I mean, you might guess that they might reflect the generality of humanity, you might guess, well, relationships are important, probably, with all human beings, probably, or maybe a little cultural gets smaller and smaller and smaller.

[41 : 34] Well, yeah, Americans are obsessed by this, or Nigerians are obsessed by, you know, but eventually it's going to get down to the individual, and yeah, it takes a lot of work, Richard, to figure out, it takes asking a question or two.

What do you care about? Yesterday, I was in the sauna, and there was a fellow that I wanted to find out, what does he care about most? And I probably have two minutes, so I've got to move fast, and I said, hey, what if you were to find this really cool Aladdin's lamp, and you could rub it, and you'd get three wishes, just in terms of what you would want to do in the world?

What would those three wishes be for you? He said, oh, wow, wow, that's interesting. Well, I think I'd really want, where do we go? To a complete stranger, within about 30 seconds, I was finding out the things that he cared about most in the world, because he would want to change.

So you think about questions that you might be able to ask to get at that, conversations, and then he gave something and says, now I know what he cares about. Let me connect that, I'll follow up. You know, that's intriguing. I've been grappling with that too, and to me the question really seems to be this, and on from there. But it helped to connect. If I would have just come in and said, have you

ever heard of the four spiritual laws?

[43 : 00] That might not have been able to have the same connection because it doesn't line up with the concern. word. So, yes. All right. Where are we here?

Ah, yes, yes, yes. So, it's also very instructive to notice that the apostle in his engagement with the Athenians opens with affirmation.

Did you notice that? Verse 22. Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. Every way you are very religious.

Verse 22. So, he's not trying to insult them. No, no. He didn't start out of the gate slapping them.

You pagans believe all the wrong things and your behavior is obnoxious.

Let me tell you the right thing to believe and the right way to live. Well, I slap them right out of the gate. No, no, no. So, why do you think it might be helpfully significant to lead with affirmation?

[44 : 14] Why do you think that might be important? Yeah, yeah, Kevin. They'll stay willing to listen.

That's right. That's right. They'll be willing to listen. I mean, if you open up with criticism or contradiction, you risk souring irritation right out of the gate and an untimely offense on the part of your hearers.

It sets up the whole conversation oppositionally. They dig in their heels. You're trying to change me. Well, that's unpromising. And notice Paul doesn't simply lead with affirmation.

He looks for opportunities for agreement and points of alignment where they can be found. Did you notice that in the text, too, where he favorably invokes Epimenides of Crete.

He cites their poets. In him, we live and move and have our being. He cites Eratus. We are indeed his offspring. Eratus, it said, you know, verse 28, says we're his offspring.

This word indeed, indeed, could stand as cipher for this sort of approach or even attitude. Indeed.

Look for opportunities in your conversation to say, indeed.

[45 : 30] In other words, yeah, I think your instinct is right on this. I think you're on to something.

Yeah, that's a thread we should pull. That seems to be right to me. Let's think about this together.

Looking for ways to affirm. You genuinely can. Sincerely. So, it helps if we as witness bearers can be, you know, you're kind of picking this up.

We want to be versatile and adaptable to our hearers. I think we're probably picking that up as one of the themes here. Versatile and adaptable.

We want to kind of cultivate a capacity to be like a good travel adapter. You guys are travelers. You know what I mean. You can get this thing and it's like a multi-plug and wherever you land, Albania, China, Singapore, you flip that around and you can figure out how to put it in the plug and get your laptop plugged in and there's a connection.

Boom, there's a charge. And that's what we want to be like, like a good travel adapter. So wherever we are with any person, you find yourself with this person, that person, the other person, you can figure out how to get a connection.

[46 : 36] Adapt yourself to get plugged in with them and adapt to them so you can get a connection, get a charge in any context that you find yourself.

And finally, let's ask, does the gospel come to our aid here? Does the gospel itself give us any resources such that our message and connection point could be adaptable?

Without wavering a whisker from Paul's assistance in Galatians 1.6, that there's only one gospel, only one gospel. If you verge from that gospel, there's no gospel at all, Paul says very insistently, does he mean by that that the gospel can have no variations that are not distortions?

Does he mean that? Perhaps we could get at that answer by asking, and I'll ask you, I'll ask us, when Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God and of himself, did he always speak of it in exactly the same way?

Give me some examples. When Jesus was talking about the gospel himself, how would be ways in which he would introduce it? What sort of terminology would he use?

[48 : 01] Kingdom of God is like, yeah, is like. What are some of the things? Living water, yeah, living water, yeah, light, bread from heaven.

heaven. It's like a person that runs away from his father and doesn't go well and comes back. It's about home.

What else? Like a farmer who went out and sowed seeds. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and a harvest.

Kingdom of God is like a period of time when the seed is sown and there will be a great harvest and you want to be on the right side of the angels in that harvest.

Yeah, exactly. Look at that. It's just there's a tropical profusion of different metaphors and tropes and images and ways in which he would communicate this.

Unbelievable variety. How about the apostles that we see in the epistles and stuff? Do we see any sort of variation on gospel themes there?

[49 : 12] What are some of the themes that are used in the epistles for the gospel? It's unfolded in terms of?

Never give up. Never give up? Yeah, perseverance. Yeah, adoption, reconciliation, justification, union with Christ.

They're all kinds. It's just unbelievable. Resurrection, exactly. Eternal life, life from above, suffering and victory, sickness to healing.

It's unbelievably rich. It's unbelievably rich. Yes, yes.

Security, invulnerability, the vicissitudes of life, joy in the midst of suffering. It's just, I mean, again, a tropical profusion. I'm going to queue you up, Alan, in about a minute here.

[50 : 27] It would seem, friends, that there is a rich abundance of the themes along which we can unfold the gospel.

To use a musical analogy, perhaps we might say that the gospel is a melody that has multiple themes and variations.

A melody with multiple themes and variations. You never get bored. Exactly. There's an infinity to it. And some of these themes and variations may resonate more with certain hearers and some with others. There is one gospel, we want to affirm with Paul in Galatians, one gospel, but it comes in many forms.

Many, many forms. And this realization allows the witness bearer to particularize our gospel witness. And we'll have, I hope, further occasion to speak about this particularization or this customization or perhaps best, personalization of the gospel to hear.

[51 : 44] We'll talk about that more. Just as, I've got to do some Bible translator because Richard's here, just as Wycliffe Bible linguists translate scripture into the language of their readers, so we as witness bearers similarly do a work of translation into the vernacular and even into the resonant idiom of each hearer.

That is, we select lovingly and curiously the variation of the gospel melody according to the ear and the heart of the hearer.

You see, what do they like? Do they like Bach? I'll play it in Bach. Do they like ragtime? I'll play the gospel in ragtime. What do they like? What will reach their heart?

What will be resonant for them? I continue to be haunted by an illustration of this unbelievable versatility and adaptability of the gospel. I'll end with that and then we'll have some questions. It comes from the early years of my ministry here at Yale when a speaker, the theologian musician Jeremy Begby, paused his talk and there happened to be a grand piano that was sitting on the stage that they hadn't moved away.

[53 : 00] He said, oh, this is handy. He walked over to it and he played this, illustrating this point that we're trying to make about the versatility and the inflecting of the gospel and different things.

Alan, can you play that about as loud as it will go so people can hear? Very, very flexible tune like the gospel itself. Wonderfully improvisable by the spirit.

Here it is in its kind of basic form, what I call the crematorium form. But suppose Bach had to improvise that, what would it sound like?

This is Jesus' joy of man's desiring grace. And of course, he always wanted to write Amazing Grace. Is finest music or what would he have done with it?

What about Mozart? What would Or maybe someone in Chicago in about 1930.

[55 : 01] What about easy listening, Amazing Grace?

I used to play this sort of stuff in airports.

I think it got removed because it was such bad taste.

Or even works as ragtime. There you go.

There you go.

[56 : 23] I can barely listen to this without getting emotional. It's the versatility of the Gospel.

It's the first time to learn how to communicate it such that it's modulated along, you know, from the melody, along a theme and variation that reaches the heart of the other.

That's how the Gospel is heard, as good news.

Sorry. Oh, okay. Thank you, team. Move with dispatch and Lord willing, we'll see you next week.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you.