

## **111 The big, Big, BIG GOSPEL**

(Apologies if this is a bunch of incoherent ramblings, but it might help someone in some way.)

Throughout this journey one recurring thought has been: “How did ‘the gospel’ turn the world upside down?” Why was it so life-changing, so world-shattering? Why were so many people (willing to be) martyred? Why was Paul willing to suffer so much for the gospel?

Would I be willing to go through a fraction of what my name-sake suffered?

Good question!

Would you?

I can’t claim ‘Yes, I would’, but the more I study, the bigger the gospel becomes in my thinking and feeling, and the more I realise how poor and narrow my view was for so many years.

In what I say here, I’m not trying to criticise anyone. As I’ve said before, I don’t have ‘the answer’, but I have a direction of travel where, as I journey, the view I see ahead gets more and more glorious, and I see more and more wonderful aspects of the kingdom of God.

In trying to be positive, I fear that I still have to start with the negative, in order to point towards where I think the positive is to be found. And maybe we can travel onwards together and share our discoveries – I would love that! (Some of you already are. Thanks!!)

So, the gospel, as I was taught it, was about how (by recognising my sin and accepting Jesus’ death in my place) I can gain personal salvation, so that when I face God, at death or when Jesus returns, I won’t get turned away, but will be welcomed into God’s kingdom (though I never used to talk about ‘kingdom’, only ever about ‘going to heaven’). Once you become a Christian, you need to grow as a Christian, be a disciple, grow in Bible study and prayer, and Christian service.

Does this sound familiar? And I’m sorry, but I really can’t see how that view of the gospel would ‘turn the world upside down’. Lack of faith on my part, perhaps?

Remember, I’m not saying any of the above is wrong; I’m just asking if there is a way we could broaden our view – otherwise, why am I now so much more enthusiastic?! Here, I can only give you a few pointers, clues, directions. Some of it will sound very vague (some of it *is* very vague) and some of it is as yet unexplored (by me, anyway). And there’s no space here to explain them.

The entry point for me was ‘discovering’ the Trinity – God as relationship. What a joy that was!

I now see the good news as much more Jewish and a lot less Greek. Jesus said he came to ‘fulfil the Law’; ‘the Bible’ in the early church was the OT; Jesus ‘explained in all the (OT) Scriptures’.

By less Greek, I mean questioning its dualistic thinking, and trying to see things more holistically – not in the modern sense, but I mean biblically holistic, i.e. Jewish holism.

The death of Jesus means so much more to me now: it's not just personal salvation but it says something about suffering (from both ill health and natural disasters), and it also speaks into systemic evil. It may not have 'answers', but the cross does have real power in those areas.

'The suffering servant' is very much in my mind just now. What does the sacrifice of Jesus mean? Was it just a substitution? A scapegoat? I think not. I'm currently looking at the Jewish sacrificial system on which the first-century 'gospel' was based. (I'll be off to mine the book of Hebrews when I've finished this article.)

And, yes, a lot of this is inspired by Flood's *Healing the Gospel* that I raved about last time [110].

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