

163 Journeyings – What has gone wrong?

Ask yourself, what are the basics of your faith? I've tried to suggest (though I might be wrong) that for most Christians these days, it's basically about "having a relationship with God".

Now, God is holy, and we are not, so we have a problem, but Jesus came to die for us so now we can be brought back into a right relationship with God. (And although we don't like to talk about it, we know what happens to those who don't believe, don't we?!)

So, if that's the central idea of our faith, what impression do you think unbelievers have of our God? Positive or negative? Sounds pretty negative to me! And we exacerbate it by our doctrine of original sin: before I have made a single decision in my life, I am condemned to hell. Really?!

What kind of God would deal people a hand like that? Does that sound like good news? Is that the basis on which the early church expanded like wildfire? No way!

Let me suggest an alternative, and this, I believe, is actually the "lost message" of the early church (please argue with me if you think I'm wrong):

Human beings are intrinsically good. They are made by a good God, and God doesn't make rubbish – we are "in God's image", for goodness sake! So I believe in the doctrine of original goodness.

And when unbelievers are loving and caring and selfless and just plain GOOD, then we shouldn't be in the least surprised – they too are inhabited by a loving God, who is expressing love through them. They too are children of their loving Father – they just don't realise it yet.

But it doesn't take a genius to realise that we all tend to be selfish and therefore we can spoil our relationships with one another and with God.

What's more, there are very real forces of evil, trying to mess up the good things that God wants to bring to human kind. We need to fight against those evil forces (Eph 6) in the way that Jesus did – using non-violent God-inspired methods.

So the form of the "good" news that we've always been taught it is firstly unchrist-like in its negativity, and secondly it's incredibly emaciated. It's basically only about me and my salvation – whether I get to heaven. And what does it have to say about the massive problems of the world, the environment, wars, refugees, etc.? Absolutely nothing!

Well, maybe if I'm saved I'm fairly well motivated so I try to help, but (tell me if I'm wrong) a much stronger motivation of this "good" news is that we have to take time and effort to share it – how else will the world be saved?!

No, the message of the early church was, I believe, that Jesus the Christ is Lord! Having believed in Jesus, I have acknowledged that Christ is the Lord of my life and, more importantly, Christ is Lord of the whole universe.

Now that's **real** good news!

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