

## ***195 Back to first principles – evangelism***

Mr Google seems to suggest that less than 5% in the UK attend church regularly. Now, if you're reading this article, you probably believe that knowing Jesus is a life-changing experience. So how could we possibly reach the 95%?!

How many Jews were there in first century Palestine? And a small subset of them had an idea: *Jesus Christ is Lord!* In under 100 years that idea had spread throughout the known world.

So can the New Testament tell us how to reach the 95%? (A friend recommended Green's 1979 classic, *Evangelism then and now*, but I can't get it.)

I've recently been asked to join *A passion for life*. The website says: '*A month of mission, A lifetime of evangelism, A passion for life*'. Over 750 churches are '*connected and are praying, learning and stepping out together to make Jesus known in our communities. Will you join us?*' Could training for (lifelong) evangelism, and having missions, help us to reach the 95%?

As a back-to-first-principles guy, I'm wondering what this 'evangelism' thing is. Is that what bore such fruit in the first century? As you may know, the word 'evangelism' doesn't appear in the Bible. 'Evangelist' does, three times, but that word doesn't have good connotations these days. OED says it's: *A person who seeks to convert others to the Christian faith, especially by public preaching.*

So what have we got? Acts 21 just refers to 'Philip the evangelist', Eph 4 lists the gifts with, 'some to be evangelists' and in 2 Tim 2, Paul urges Timothy to 'do the work of an evangelist'.

Pending Michael Green's view (or any other book suggestions, please?), and thinking in terms of words (as I do!), to know what an NT **evangelist** did, we need to know what the 'evangel' is, the gospel, the good news. And on that, my view has changed.

I guess most Christians think of 'the gospel' as the means by which Jesus' death and resurrection gains my personal salvation, but I think that is far too narrow a definition. It's part of it, yes, an essential part of it (and I hope the following illustration won't offend) but...

To say that to 'preach the gospel of the kingdom' is to explain the means of personal salvation – as modern evangelism does – is like trying to tell people the whole relationship of marriage by explaining about the central physical act. We need to teach and model the relationship, not just keep telling them about the means of salvation.

I have come to believe that 'preaching the gospel' is about narrating the whole story of King Jesus, which is not something you can do in a two-hour gospel meeting. Maybe the NT evangelist was someone who (before the gospel was written down) was particularly gifted at telling the story, and not someone who was good at coaxing people into 'making a decision for Jesus'?

Please tell me what you think. (Could anyone lend me Green's book, perhaps?)

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