

God's rescue plan?

OK, so last time we left 'Martha' feeling guilty and afraid. She knows God's love in her life and wants to communicate it to her friends and family (F&F), but she doesn't feel that explaining how they are sinners in need of a saviour will actually help. She says they'll just think she's being judgmental, saying she's superior to them because they are 'terrible sinners'.

The problem is that unless our F&F see there's a **problem**, why would they bother looking for a **solution**?!

OK, so maybe we could ask them, 'Is life perfect? Is **your** life perfect? Are the lives of your F&F perfect? Is the life of the world perfect?' and at some point, they would see that, yes, there really is a problem in need of a solution. We can then ask them, 'If God were to exist, if God were a loving God, would God want to provide help?' It's a no-brainer! Of course God would do everything possible to help!

So, what have we got to offer them when they say 'OK, so **how** does God help?' Well, we have 'the gospel':

- The problem with the world is individual wrongdoing – we all do things wrong
- God has provided a solution: God sent Jesus to die, to give us free forgiveness
- So we can go to heaven

Sounds a bit 'thin', doesn't it? 'How is that going to solve **anything!**', they might reasonably ask.

This 'gospel' is based on a criminal/legal model of guilt and innocence. It says that even if we've done some terrible things in our lives – murder, even – it's OK because God will forgive us.

'So the man who abused me for all those years through my childhood just gets forgiven – just like that?!' says my friend 'Anuka'. But Anuka is self-harming and has attempted suicide more than once because she feels like a piece of s**t. How is that 'gospel' going to help her? I can tell her that she's a sinner, in desperate need of forgiveness, but it's OK because God loves her and...

Forget it!

But does God **not** love Anuka?! Does God not have a solution?! Can God not restore Anuka?! Can God not convince Anuka that she really is loved and precious?!

Listen, folks, I'm not saying that the model of penal substitution is wrong; I'm just saying that while it helped Martin Luther to overcome his crushing sense of guilt for his own sin, we need something else if we're to reach out to our own F&F in language they can understand.

Martha is real (not called Martha, of course) but Anuka is made up, though she represents enough real situations. My own F&F are all lovely people, each in their own way doing something to sort out the mess of broken relationships. Have I anything to offer them? Thankfully, I have, and

that's why I'm so fired up at the moment. The gospel, the real gospel, the more beautiful gospel, which is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus has **everything** to offer them.

Over the next few days I'll be offering some suggestions as to how the gospel can help Anuka, and also 'Bernard' whose life is a misery through no fault of his own, but through his severe ill health; he just can't believe in a God who would allow him to suffer as he does. And then there's 'Cherry', who is in a work situation, from which she can't escape for financial reasons, and it's grinding her down; she's basically being exploited by the system.

But take heart! God really does love us, God does love our F&F, and God **does** have plans to reach our F&F.

Watch this space!

(But if you want to find out what the next exciting episode is, then read 'Healing the Gospel' by Derek Flood. The next article will be based on his chapter 3.)

Father God, please help us to trust you for our friends and family who don't yet know you. Please give us a way to communicate your amazing love to them.

Lord, let it be!

Paul Bev. 15.3.19