

Communicating the gospel

In my very first article in August I wrote: ‘*So does God actually **want** people to come to know his love? Of course he does! Then you and I need to do some serious thinking about how we communicate that love in the 21st century.*’ At the time, I was asking how we could communicate sin-and-a-holy-God – the bad news – so that people could appreciate what Christ has done for them by dying on the cross – the good news.

What a long journey I’ve been on! To communicate God’s love, I first needed a **very** different view of what ‘the gospel’ actually is. So let’s try again to ask how we can communicate God’s love...

I have deliberately not titled this article ‘Preaching the gospel’, even though the Bible talks repeatedly about ‘preaching *the good news*’ and ‘preaching *the good news of the kingdom*’ or just ‘preaching *the kingdom*’ (there’s a rough list at the end of the article). Maybe I’m being unbiblical, but I prefer ‘communicating’, because the modern connotations of ‘preaching’ are **telling** people that they are wrong, sinful, and going to hell, **telling** them what’s right and what’s wrong. So if we ‘preach’ in that sense it just puts people off. How many of my ‘twenty men’ don’t go to church now because they don’t want to be preached at?! Most, I would guess.

So, if we think that the gospel really is good news – the best news EVER – then we have to put ourselves in the place of ‘*les vingt*’ and ask how they see us, how they see Jesus. What is going to attract them to this man that we find so irresistible.

But actually is it worth stopping right there, and checking ourselves? Do we **really** find Jesus irresistible? Or do we just believe that: yes, the Christian faith is true. Two years ago, I said to people that I had ‘regained my faith’; I could recite the creed without any qualms, but my faith was just a set of beliefs. Now I feel as if I’m on fire! I just want to know how I can best communicate the gospel/the good news/the kingdom to the people around me. Please God!

When I woke this morning, I thought of my spiritual director’s comment yesterday, that in view of my strong feelings about what ‘the gospel’ really is (the story of Jesus, not just a ‘way to get saved’), it might be a good idea to look at Matthew 5–7, especially the beatitudes. As I lay there, I thought about the first one: *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Now ‘poor in spirit’ is hardly a description I’d have given my former self. I **knew** what was what, I knew the gospel and I could prove it to anyone who was willing to talk to me about it. I had spent years persuading people, and I had persuaded a number of people come to faith.

But then the reason I ended up in that sect was that its leader had a powerful healing and prophetic ministry, which I thought was a good way to **prove** to people that God is real and active today, doing miracles. And I felt that my church was short-changing the gospel by neglecting modern miracles.

Where was I? Oh yes, in bed, thinking about ‘theirs is the kingdom of heaven’. Sounds weird, doesn’t it? It sounds as if Jesus is saying that such people ‘own’ the kingdom – it’s ‘theirs’. The next phrase that came to mind as I dozed was ‘the kingdom of God **BELONGS** to such as these’ – so somebody really **does** own the kingdom; where does that come from? I couldn’t remember, so I rushed downstairs to find out. Are you ahead of me? It’s the little children! Luvvit!

But what **IS** this ‘kingdom’?! When did you last hear someone ‘preaching the kingdom’? So if I’ve discovered that the **gospel** is so much bigger and more glorious than being just being a mechanism for salvation, and if the **cross** is so much bigger and more glorious than I ever thought, then maybe the kingdom is something much more wonderful too. I can’t wait to do some more Bible study. Indeed, the list below was a starter for me – interesting that ‘preach the gospel’ and ‘preach the kingdom’ seem to be synonymous.

Sorry, this article is distraction upon distraction! Where was I? Yes, how can we communicate the good news to *les vingt*? At an Alpha follow-up meeting, ‘Ariadne’, the wife of one of these men, said that a lifelong friend of her husband (Cedric) was very brutally murdered six years ago, here in Norwich, and that it was a mutual friend of Cedric’s who discovered the remains of the body, and that poor chap has since died of stress. So how can Cedric **ever** believe in God?! That’s a genuine question! This a real person, dearly loved by God and for whom Christ gave his life. How are we to communicate to Cedric? I want to know, NOW!

But I am encouraged to a degree. In one of the later Alpha sessions, I asked the group if they felt that anything had changed during the course, and Ariadne (who is even older than me, I think) said that she felt she had become more patient as a result, especially with her husband who was ‘a little difficult at times’ and isn’t in the best of health (she didn’t say anything, at that time, about the death of Cedric’s friend).

As Ariadne and others get more and more quietly excited about Jesus, and as their lives change for the better, as they increase in the fruits of the spirit, as they pray for their Cedrics, as they listen to them, as they care for them, do you not think they’ll be **communicating the gospel** and doing so very powerfully?

Seriously, just suppose that we all really were full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, wouldn’t the effect be dramatic?!

I shared this idea with the wife of another of *les vingt*. She shook her head despondently: ‘Yes, but I’m **not** full of the fruit of the Spirit’. She has a really lovely husband who is very supportive of what she does ‘for the church’, and she feels that **he** is more full of that fruit than **she** is! It would be a miracle if we really were full of love, joy, peace...

But hang on! How big is your God?! Does God really do miracles today?! Doesn’t God **want** Cedric to come to faith? (thy will be done) Let’s pray for miracles in each other’s lives. Pray that God’s Spirit will be poured into our hearts and that we’ll be full to overflowing with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Join the quiet revolution of God’s love in and through us. Thy will be done!

Lord, let it be!

Paul Bev. 5.4.19

preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!
preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,
preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.
preach Christ out of selfish ambition
preach good news to the poor.
preach him among the Gentiles
preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.
preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
preach the good news of the kingdom of God
preach the good news to all creation.
preach the good news.
preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.
preach the gospel in the regions beyond you.
preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,
preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.
preach the gospel to them.
preach the gospel where Christ was not known
preach the gospel – not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its
power.
preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the
gospel!
preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.
Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season
preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'
preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,
preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living
and the dead.
preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."
preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.
preached that Christ has been raised from the dead,
preached that people should repent.
preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.
preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.
preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ
preached the good news to them.
preached the gospel of God to you.
preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.
preached the gospel to you.
preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.
preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.
preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."
preached the word of the Lord.
preached the word to them.
preached the word wherever they went.
preacher of righteousness, and seven others;
preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached,
preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished.
preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.
preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.
preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.
preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.
preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.
preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge
preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.
preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.
preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?
preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you
preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.
preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.
preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.
preaching the word in the province of Asia.
preaching the word of God at Berea
preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!
preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,
preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.