

74 'And here is the news'

In my previous article, I tried to define 'the good news', but I was unhappy about my definition, even after sharing it. Now, after my recent studies on 'the kingdom', I'm even more unhappy.

As I said in [73], from my reading through the Gospels and Acts:

The strongest theme in Jesus' preaching seems to be **the kingdom**.

And what struck me most from Acts was their insistence on **the lordship of Christ**.

I looked back at my definition in [73] and was cross with myself because, after all I'd said in my articles, I had made it about 'me and my salvation'. I then tried to broaden my definition out, to make it more about covenant or family or kingdom (remember that the Lord's prayer has no 'I' or 'me' in it, anywhere!), but I couldn't see how to stop my definition being so individual-based.

But why did I write the definition in the first place? As I said in [73], I'm due to meet with two theologically aware friends with whom I've been discussing my ideas ... and not always agreeing. Not wanting to just run over areas of disagreement, I suggested that we talked about: How can we best communicate the good news? (and my subtext was 'especially to men'!)

But one of them made what I thought was a good point: How can we discuss how to communicate the good news unless and until we agree what the good news actually is?

If you remember, in [70], I contrasted what I once thought of as the good news (that Jesus offers a solution to the problem of sin), with what I now think it is (the narrative of Jesus' life, death, etc.)

Maybe the reason that my 20+ husbands of believing wives won't believe is that we're trying to convince them of something they can't relate to? What if the 'good news' is actually different things to different people. Is that such a heretical idea?!

Seeing the good news in terms of penal substitution really isn't too helpful for some people – 'pastorally inappropriate, to say the least', as one of my two friends said. And I've said that we must treat people as individuals – one of our most important evangelistic tools is our ears.

Anyway, if we want to define the good news then we should at least start from the scriptures and let them teach us; we need to resist the temptation to start with our definition and show how each of the scriptures fits that definition.

So where did this 'good news' start? It started with John the Baptist, then moved on to Jesus and then to the apostles and the disciples:

*John answered them all, 'I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will **burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**' And with many other words John exhorted the people and **preached the good news** to them. (Luke 3:16-18)*

*'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to **preach good news to the poor.** He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to*

release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' ... 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' (Luke 4:18-21)

*'The time has come,' [Jesus] said. 'The kingdom of God is near. **Repent and believe the good news!***' (Mark 1:15)

*You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling **the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*** (Acts 10:36)

Are all these good newses the same thing? Can one definition incorporate John's hellfire preaching, Jesus' reassurance to the poor that 'theirs is the kingdom of heaven', and the apostles' good news that Jesus is 'the Christ' and 'the Lord of all'?

I'm not sure that you **can** form a definition; there is no clear pattern that I can see. Yes, we might be able to define what it is **not**, but I'm really not convinced that God is interested in precise definitions of the way God works.

Now, I'm a words man, so I look at the meanings of words, and this helps me learn new things. So what do we think when we hear, 'And here is the news'? We know that we're going to hear several 'items of news'.

So is 'the gospel' just one single item of news that we can define, package and sell (albeit that we have to use different techniques to sell it to different types of people)?

Or could it be more fundamental than that? Could the 'good news' actually be different for different people? Does the multi-millionaire who discovers that money can't buy love need the same good news as the meths-drinker; does the serious and responsible school-teacher need to hear the same good news as the happy-go-lucky street musician; and what about someone who has had a string of terrible health issues (or whose spouse has), or the victim of sexual abuse...?

As we pray for each of these people, and if we can introduce each of them to the historic Jesus then surely the Holy Spirit can give each one of them, according to their needs, an understanding of how Jesus' death on the cross can be 'for them'?

But look at what I'm doing yet again! I'm trying to work out how I can convince each person that we have the right answer for their needs. Is that **really** what the kingdom of God is about?! If they are poor, they need feeding, if they are in some form of prison, they need releasing. This is much more costly than just 'telling them the gospel'.

I need to go back to God and see what it means to preach the good news of the kingdom.

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