

376 *Once upon a time...*

You're reading a book and as the story runs, you see what's going on, where the story is heading, what the book is all about... but then, in the final chapters, something happens, something is revealed, and suddenly your whole view has to change. If you were to reread it – knowing what you know now – the whole thing would look totally different.

The absolute brilliance of the Author of the Book I'm thinking about is that it is actually a *true* story about *real* things that happened to *real* people. In the latter Part of the Story, you suddenly understand how the Author was actually working *inside* the Story; the Author became *part* of the Story – a kind of autobiography – brilliant!

But if you only read Part II, without knowing Part I, you wouldn't see the amazing significance of the things that happened; the things people said wouldn't make sense: Part II is totally founded on Part I.

Now, the way we read a given story – what we understand from it and how it affects us – will depend on what we think the purpose of that story is. So what do we tell our children the Bible is about? How much do we say it's about how we should *behave* towards each other? How much do we say it's about how we can, despite being sinners, be acceptable to God? That's the good news, right?! The Bible's purpose is to show how we can be saved.

Well, no; I now think the Bible is actually about God – not about me – about God having lovingly created the universe, including autonomous creatures, and how God has a multi-millennial plan to live in a wonderful loving relationship with those creatures.

It's about how God works to 'civilise' those creatures, enabling them to live together without killing one another... clearly, a work in progress! But the crucial stage was when God somehow became *part* of that creation, actually became one of those creatures – yes, impossible, I know! God's plan is continuing, to increase people's understanding of one another, and ultimately God will create a scenario where there is no evil at all; all will be love; all will be God.

What about that? Complicated, isn't it? Difficult to get your head around? It's far easier to see the purpose of the Book as being to tell us how to get saved. *Much* easier to explain – it even fits into a booklet.

People in Part II got passionately excited about The Good News, which to them was how the (true) Story of Jesus fulfilled the (true) Story of God working with and through Israel to bless the whole world, and *part* of that Story involves individual salvation.

Jesus preached that same Good News – yes, even *before* he had died and risen! He showed how he was fulfilling the predictions of Part I.

'Do you remember how our hearts were burning inside us ... as he opened up the Bible for us?' Lk 24:32 It now sets my heart on fire, too!

In case you think this is my own silly idea, here's what N.T. Wright says in his foreword to the book I am now (re)reading, Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*.

Well, you say, but isn't the gospel about salvation? Yes and no, replies Scott (quite rightly). Why, after all, did the early Christians call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John "the gospel" (not "the gospels": one gospel, four tellings, was how they saw it)?

Answer – according to Scott, and I'm convinced he's right: "the gospel" is the story of Jesus of Nazareth told as the climax of the long story of Israel, which in turn is the story of how the one true God is rescuing the world.