

382 Going? Or coming? We need to repent!

OK, I do overstate things, but it's only to try to get us to question what we've 'always been taught'. I think (that Tom Wright teaches) that the church is pointing in the wrong direction. Our focus is on persuading individuals about **going** to heaven whereas the early church was focused on heaven **coming** to earth – ultimately and finally, but also to a growing extent here and now. A totally different direction.

My worst example is that I was on a church council where we assessed our organisations: if a given group wasn't seen to be 'preaching the gospel' then it wasn't valid. Our job was to attract people to join our group so that we could persuade them to 'believe in Jesus'.

Forgive me, but can you see anywhere your Bible about individuals 'going to heaven'? Yet that's what the church taught us, from the cradle; it's embedded in our minds – AND in non-believers' minds! So we need to **repent** – rethink, and maybe read some of what Tom Wright says in *Surprised by Hope*, but I admit it's fairly heavy going. Well, he's giving the lie to what the church has been teaching for centuries, so it has to be explained carefully; we need to read our Bibles and think it through.

Thankfully, it feels to me that there's a growing body of people who **are** challenging what we've always accepted as 'the gospel',^[381] and I find Tom Wright's writings helpful. With his deep biblical knowledge and insight, he's pointing us to a different way, more like the teaching of the early church.

But expect a kickback! Even for someone like me, who has not been a Bible teacher, it's difficult to do a fundamental rethink – it took a total loss of faith ('Does God even exist?!) for me to go back to the drawing board. Imagine how difficult it must be for someone who has spent their whole lives teaching this to perhaps hundreds of people: Actually, what I've been teaching as 'the gospel' is wrong.

This just came to mind: How can we relate to **Our** heavenly **Father**? How can we hallow God's name? How can we help God's kingdom to come? How can we do God's will? How do we ensure that people have enough to eat? How do we increase forgiveness in our communities? How do we avoid – and help others to avoid – evil?

Wouldn't a community like that attract people? Lord, may **thy kingdom come**!

Oh! I've got 80 words left, so a final thought from reading Acts just now: the disciples were called to be witnesses to something that happened. Read about their preaching – it's all about 'Jesus-and-the-resurrection' – something that happened – and declaring that 'Jesus is Lord'. Not a sausage about the 'gospel' of how-I-get-saved.

We're being told to be **barristers** to persuade. No! We're simply **witnesses** to report what happened. Clearly, historically, something dramatic **did** happen, and whatever it was, it sparked a revolution!