

8 - The Gospel is Good News

Good News

The point we must remember is that the Gospel is, by definition, Good News! (At least it is to those who respond in trusting obedience to Jesus.) Good news makes people cheerful and gives them hope.

For the Gospel to be good news it must connect with a need or concern that makes sense to the person. That is why Jesus tailored His message to the needs and concerns of the person he was addressing. We should do the same.

Jesus did not have any difficulty drawing a crowd because He spoke about things that mattered to His hearers. But more than that, He healed and delivered them and even fed them!

Bad News

Good news is good because it contrasts with something bad. But many people are not particularly aware of what is bad in their lives and may not be very interested in the Good News of the Gospel. Jesus encountered this often. His response to those who didn't think they needed a saviour was:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Lk 5:31)

Many evangelists are not happy with this response. They work hard to try to convince people that they need a saviour. They think that for people to be motivated to turn to Christ for salvation, they need first to become convinced that they are destined for hell. The puritan preachers were famous for their graphic portrayals of hell in the preaching of the Gospel ("Sinners in the hands of an angry God" is perhaps the most famous sermon by Jonathan Edwards). This makes logical sense to us, but it seems that Jesus did not see it like that.

Jesus is the only one who has truly seen the Father. And He is the only one who has truly seen the destiny that awaits all who are not saved. Jesus was far more aware of the reality of hell than anyone, and he spoke about hell more than any other person in scripture.

However, the way He talked about hell is very instructive; He taught using stories. Lazarus and the rich fool (Luke 16:19ff), The weeds in the harvest (Matt 13:24-43), The drag-net (Matt 13:47-50), The wedding feast (Matt 22:1-14), The sheep and goats (Matt 25:31-46).

Rather than trying to convince people that they needed a saviour through argument, Jesus simply told stories. He left it to the hearers to think about those stories and apply them to themselves.

But when Jesus first met people, He did not start with these stories about heaven and hell. Instead he asked them what they wanted:

"What do you want?" (John 1:38)

"What do you want me to do for you?" (Lk 18:41)

"Do you want to get well?" (Jn 5:6)

Jesus shared the Gospel as good news for the "felt" needs of the person he spoke to. Later He helped them, through stories, to think about their deeper needs.

The Destination, not the Means of Transport

The Good News is that we are invited to share in God's Kingdom on earth. It is the invitation to a destination.

The good news is *not* an explanation about the busses and trains and engines and fuel that are essential to get us to that destination.

The hundreds of disciples that followed Jesus before his death knew nothing about Jesus dying to save them from their sins. They simply believed that Jesus was sent by God to usher in the new age of the kingdom of God. They believed and were baptised on that basis.

The cross is the essential means of the gospel, but not its point. The "transport" that could get people from where they were to that Kingdom was not something that Jesus mentioned until the Last Supper.

When we focus on the cross instead of the Kingdom, we focus on something that Jesus did not.

Conclusion

Jesus tailored His message to the needs and concerns of the person he was addressing. We should do the same, by enquiring about a person's life and circumstances and offering prayer, healing and the love of God. If they open up, we can share the invitation to God's Kingdom... Explanations of the role of the cross in our salvation can safely be left to much later.