

September 15, 2019

Good News

Luke 4:14-21

Is there any good news? If you read the news this morning you might wonder ...

This Fall we're thinking about some of God's good news. God's blessings to us. In particular we are asking the question, "What is God's 'good news'?" What is God's good news for us, personally? What is God's good news for our world? Why does it matter?

Sometimes we ONLY focus on the question, what is the good news for ME? And when I get an answer – God loves me, forgives me, and I'll go to heaven when I die – I stop there. That's all good – as far as it goes ... But what is the good news for other people?

- For those who lost everything in Hurricane Dorian?
- For the families of the those killed in shootings in Odessa, El Paso or Dayton?
- For those struggling with opioid addiction?
- For those looking for work?
- For those dealing with chronic pain or illness?

"Going to heaven when you die" is not "BIG ENOUGH" Good News. Thankfully, the Good News of Jesus is bigger than that.

What do we mean by "Good News"?

There are some "churchy" words we sometimes use when we talk about the Good News:

- "Evangelism"/"Evangelistic"/"Evangelical" – which comes from the Greek word used throughout the New Testament, "eu" (meaning "good") and "angellion" (meaning "message" or "news"). So evangelism literally means "good-news-ism." An evangelical church should be a church of the good news.
- "Gospel" is an old, Shakespearean English word that also literally means "good news" ("go-" good, and "spel" news). So the word "gospel" is an old-fashioned way of saying "good news" as well.

In a non-churched, non-Christian world, the words "evangel-" (in all its forms) and "gospel" are not very helpful. "Gospel" is not a word many people know the meaning of. "Evangelism" conjures up images of whacking people with the Four Spiritual Laws or shady TV personalities with Hollywood mansions. "Evangelical" has been so closely linked to American political personalities and has been hijacked to excuse racism, sexism, anti-immigrantism, anti-this-ism, anti-that-ism ... anything but good news!

I personally prefer using the literal translation of the Greek "euangellion" and the Old English "gospel": Good News. It carries a lot less cultural baggage. That raises the

logical question: What is the Good News?

What is Jesus' Good News?

The Bible – and Jesus – are brutally honest about the world in which we live. There is a lot of evil, suffering, violence, pain, struggle. We could go on and on complaining about all the problems. But Jesus brings hope, life, and love into the midst of it.

Consider these examples from the first few chapters of Luke:

- When dealing with a man with an evil spirit, Jesus casts it out
- When met by a man with leprosy, Jesus touches and heals
- When faced with people with sin "issues," Jesus heals and forgives
- When people are hungry and thirsty, Jesus feeds them

What's the Good News in each case? *"The blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor"* (Matthew 11:5). Jesus never says anything (yet) about going to heaven when you die. He is much more concerned with dealing with their problems right here, right now. He wants them to know Him – God Himself, come in power among them – and to know His healing, helping, loving touch in their lives in the moment.

What might we learn from Jesus' example?

The Good News is far BIGGER than just "you'll be with Jesus when you die" (although it includes that).

1. ***The Good News is Jesus deals with sin and evil.*** Through the cross, we are saved from our sin. On the cross, all the sin of all the world focusses upon Jesus – upon God himself. All evil and wickedness – the personal sins of the chief priests and Pilate, the political sins of Roman power and cruelty, the economic sins of a world where the rich get richer and poor get poorer, the religious sins of a corrupt Jewish system, the social sins of a crowd who yells "Crucify Him!," even the natural sins of darkness and earthquake, all come crashing down on Jesus as He dies upon the cross. That's Good News.
2. ***The Good News is also that Jesus loves you and is with you*** – right here, right now – in whatever circumstances you find yourself. Jesus can help you deal with the situation you find yourself in – your practical needs as well as your spiritual needs. This is how Jesus deals with the BIG problem of evil in the world. He doesn't helicopter His people out of the suffering. He wades into the midst of the flood of pain Himself, to be with His people in it. He experiences the pain and suffering we experience – and more. He is with us through the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." And He carries us through the swarming currents.

This is Jesus' Good News: He may not necessarily miraculously heal you or solve

all your problems, but He will help you find the resources you need to deal with those challenges. We are never alone. *"Be sure of this,"* says Jesus, *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20).

3. And ***ultimately, one day, someday, you will be with Him.*** That's Good News that's BIG enough to deal with all the challenges of life.

The Good News includes ...US!

But the point of my new relationship with God is not that I, personally, simply enjoy His presence now and forever. He has a bigger purpose for my life than simply me, myself, and I, being blessed. Yes, Jesus saves us FROM the power of sin and death. Absolutely. But He also saves us FOR a bigger purpose: to bring His hope and healing into our world.

The Good News is also that He wants us to have a purposeful life: part of building His Kingdom. He wants us to live our faith in deed and word. He wants us to ***be*** and to ***share*** God's good news with the world. In the deepest core of our being, we yearn for that sense of purpose and significance. We are His Good News to other people.

Among the spiritually gifted people in the church are "evangelists" (Ephesians 4:11). Evangelists are people who are especially gifted at sharing the good news (think of high-profile examples like Paul, himself, and Billy Graham). Not everyone is an evangelist. But evangelists exist. There are people in our church who are really good at sharing God's good news. Thank God He has gifted His church with evangelists.

You may not have been called to be a specially gifted evangelist. We all are called to something more than just a humdrum life. We are called to live a particular kind of life every day, a godly life, a God-honouring life. We are all called to *"lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God"* (Ephesians 4:1). A life characterized by:

- Humility and Gentleness (4:2)
- Patience with each other (4:2)
- Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love (4:2)
- Making every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit (4:3)
- Binding yourselves together with peace (4:3)

When we live like this, Michael Frost in his book, *Surprise the World*, suggests we live "questionable lives" – the kind of lives people ask questions about: why do you care the way you care? Give the way you give? Live the way you live? Forgive the way you forgive? Love the way your love? This naturally opens up opportunities for us to talk about Jesus. We simply, naturally share our faith in Jesus because that's who we are.

In Acts, while Peter, Paul, and other gifted evangelists were proclaiming the gospel, thousands of "ordinary" believers (people just like us) were infiltrating every part of society and living the kind of questionable lives that invited curiosity about Jesus. They surprised the Roman Empire by their lifestyles.

These normal believers cared for the poor. They fed the hungry. They loved their enemies. They forgave their persecutors. They buried the bodies of those who died from infectious diseases (which no one else would touch).

The Emperor Julian (331-363 AD) was alarmed by their astonishing lives: *"When it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the (pagan) priests, the (Christians) observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained notoriety through the credit they win from such practices. Just as someone can entice a child with a cake – by throwing pieces to them two or three times – and get them to follow them ... by the same method these (Christians) also begin with their hospitality or service of tables – and the result is that they have led many into (Christianity)."*

Julian decided to go on the offensive, instructing his imperial officials and the Roman priests to out-love the Christians by distributing food and building hostels for travelers:

"It is their kindness to strangers, their care for the dead, and the holiness of their lives that have done the most to increase (Christianity). I believe we really and truly ought to practice every one of these virtues. It is disgraceful when the (Christians) support not only their own poor but ours as well."

Julian's attempts at reform failed miserably. Without the Spirit, his reforms were a flop. Meanwhile, the church grew. Why? Because of the way ordinary believers lived the good news. They fed the poor, they welcomed all people, rich and poor, of every nationality, men and women, young and old. In the highly stratified, harsh world of the Roman Empire, their conduct surprised people. They lived "questionable lives."

We can do that, too. One practical opportunity is to give through Canadian Baptist Ministries (CBM) to hurricane relief in the Bahamas. We're part of the global Baptist Forum for Aid & Development which is assisting the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship and the Bahamas Baptist Convention (visit www.cbmin.org). We can be God's Good News.

What is the "Good News"? God has destroyed the power of sin and evil on the cross.

God is with us – always. He brings hope, healing, life, and love into a broken, hurting, violent, evil world right now. That's Good News for today and for all eternity.

We are His Good News. We have purpose. As we conduct ourselves, in word and deed, in ways that show forth, that shine forth the love of Jesus, we will live questionable lives, lives that lead others to see and experience the love of God for themselves.