**360 Gospel**

‘Twenty years ago, the members of the British Council of Churches (Forerunner of Churches Together in England – and, I suspect, the BCC Committee for Evangelism) met to discuss their responsibility to present the gospel to those who had not heard it. They decided to begin by defining it. The problem was that only two of them were prepared to hazard a guess’.

Alison Morgan in The Wild Gospel 2004 page 198 - quoting A Walker, Telling the Story p11

Ask groups of people for their gospel from the Bible

* John 3:13 In a nutshell
* Acts 1: 22-39: death and resurrection
* Romans 1:3-6 and rest of the letter
* 1 Corinthians 13: love greatest way
* Revelation 3:20
* etc

Ask a Biblical scholar to do the work for us:

Tom Wright’s 5 definitions (Trevin Wax blog)

Try to find the gospel in the Gospels, find very few books.

Martin Hengel produces a masterpiece of critical research that the person in the pew will not easily understand, while James M Robinson says we have to get behind the gospel of the church, and behind the four Gospel books to piece together the Q source – which, though fascinating, I think misses the point of the gospel message.

What is the gospel?

CARDS

Inspired by two books

Learning evangelism from Jerram Barrs

Jesus the Evangelist by Robin Gamble:

1. Good News!
2. The Kingdom of God is Here!
3. Repent and Believe!

‘These three topics do not arrange themselves into a neat formula, or sequence; instead they should be seen much more as a sort of fluid zone in which Jesus the Proclaimer moved a round. Our task then, is to flesh out these big brassy trumpet blasts and see how they can become the basis for our evangelistic message today’. Robin Gamble, Jesus the Evangelist p 66/7

Read evangelistic booklets or websites to get the basic message – all different.

Read St Paul and Jesus Christ – difference in emphasis as Paul, based very much on his experience (like many of us I suspect and have studied) eg Bill Hybells in the Contagious Christian who heard the message ‘I really matter to God’ and says that when he preaches he always makes sure the people listening get the message - ‘I matter to God’.

Saw this worked out when I was on the college staff at Church Army when we had the large influx of students recently converted by the preaching of Billy Graham. You can imagine the style of evangelism they wanted to adopt! In the same way, students who had become Christians through counselling often preferred to take a pastoral approach and saw listening as critical to mission.

‘In effect, Jesus is our primary model for mission, and the Gospels are our primary texts. This might sound somewhat prosaic, but it is actually a massive paradign shift from the way in which church has generally viewed Christology in the Christendom mode. Jesus has been read through dogmatic ontological frames (as in the creeds) or in the structure of Paulinism (as in the Reformation), both obscuring the primary historical portrait of Jesus as found ion the Gospels. ….. We evangelicals have for too long read Jesus through predominantly what have been called Pauline eyes. We doubt the Apostle Paul read Jesus this way himself. But by reading the gospel through the Epistles, a disturbing distortion develops. Effectively, the Gospels are not taken seriously as prescriptive texts for life, mission, and discipleship. Now let it be said that we affirm the Pauline view of Jesus. But our perspectives oif Jesus can be so weighted by and filtered through the Pauline interpretation of the Messiah that we are unable to see him without hearing the Pauline formulas in our heads. Actually the problem is not Paul at all, the problem lies in Paulin-*ism*. Like always, the –ism is the problem It is worth reminding us that Paul himself was very keen to ensure that we focus on Jesus and not on him (1Cor1:11-17) and he encouraged us to follow him only insofar as he allowed the Messiah (1Cor 11:1). Paul always pointed to Jesus, and we need to take his advice again now as we find ourselves in a missional setting remarkably similar to the one Paul was in’.

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, The Shaping of things to come – innovation and mission for the 21st C church. Hendrickson 2005. P112/3

Read the four Gospels and reflected on the most obvious gospel question put to Jesus, ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Interestingly this was asked by two different people, and – surprise, surprise, they got two different answers!

Who were they and what were they told?

Read Luke 10: 25-28

Read Mark 10:17-50

Many years ago, Geoff Pearson, I think speaking at Fellowship for Parish Evangelism, talked about the gospel as a diamond with many facets - each person being given a different facet of the universal gospel message. We have just read two facets of the gospel message, as Jesus knew they were directly applicable to the specific spiritual and deepest need of the individual concerned. This is not the approach of ‘Four Spiritual Laws’ or the ABC of the gospel to ‘Accept, Believe and Confess’ – helpful though I find those approaches are. This is not ‘one sized fits all’ but a ‘tailor made’ gospel.

To see how tailor made it is see this J John video, which makes the point and stretches it to the limit!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LV94ZGk6GI>

Given the Gospels as they are, without the usual critical studies but at face value as the four Evangelists and the universal church has handed down to us over the centuries, I asked myself ‘well what is the gospel message of Jesus – as we read it from the four Gospel books? One day we preach on the Call of the fishermen, while another Nicodemus. Another day we consider Jesus message to the woman at the well or the tax man up a tree.

Over the years I have found this to be the most profound quote about evangelism not found in the Bible.

‘An essentially biblical emphasis – all too often ignored by the church – is that Christ is Lord and Saviour of the whole of a person, or he is no saviour at all. Because Jesus insisted on seeing the person whole, one could never be sure which aspect of a person’s need he would tackle first. Here comes the paralysed man, helpless and obviously sick in body. His friends have brought him hoping for a simple sure, and Jesus talks about forgiveness of sins. Here, on the other hand comes a clear case of spiritual need, an enquirer asking how to gain eternal life, and Jesus gives him an economic answer, telling him to give away his goods to the poor. Because ultimately Jesus cannot rest content until all of a (person’s) needs are fully met, it does not matter much to him where he starts on the work of salvation.

Quoted by Ronald Jasper in Pray every day, (Collins 1976) p.51, from John V Taylor, Mission as Dialogue.

So, what is your deepest need? What is the good news – the gospel for you today? Should you have your sins forgiven – or are you to give away your goods to the poor?

Stop to pray and minister to each other?

The ‘360’ in the title of this address comes from the study I have been doing about the nature of the gospel – as seen in the Gospels. I am amazed that no one seems to have done the study before – correct me if I am wrong – but in avoiding duplicate texts, I found quotes of Jesus that could have been an answer to the ultimate gospel question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

That list is at: <http://www.jesus360.org.uk/top_50_texts.html>

Read a few that have been placed on the chairs – all 50 are scattered about here.

Now I wanted to get the big picture, and collate the common threads – which forms the essence of the Grove booklet ‘The 360 Gospel of Jesus’ – my understanding of the gospel message of Jesus from the four Gospel books.

In the Grovebook, and on the website [www.jesus360.org.uk](http://www.jesus360.org.uk), you will see an image of this ‘big picture’ – at a glance in a kind of jigsaw. Sometimes called a ‘tag cloud’, this is an image produced by a clever piece of free software, which analyses a bulk quantity of text. What spots is repeat use of words – and the more a word is repeated the larger it is presented. So, because the question put to Jesus was about eternal life, and this is a recurring theme in John’s Gospel, you will not be surprised to see ‘Life’ and ‘eternal repeated most often.

What does the picture suggest when so many words are of similar size?

What surprises you as not being obvious – a word often repeated on the lips of some evangelists, sometimes shouted, sometimes even painted on the sides of houses – but strangely absent from the lips of Jesus himself. We shall consider what Jesus said – and did (there’s the clue) in a moment.

I am applying crude tools to analyse a complex topic.



The word surprisingly absent in ‘repent’ – but we know from Mark 1:15 where Jesus is quoted – in the tradition of John the Baptist before him – ‘Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’

What’s going on? As Robin Gamble reminded us – the trumpet blast headline is clear – but what happens in the detail? What do we read in the detailed Gospel accounts, written remember by Evangelists keen to convey the message of the Gospel, about the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, Zacceaeus, the woman at the well, Matthew, the rich man all who needed to repent of one sin or another? How do you read?

At the beginning of Jesus ministry, the man lowered through the roof for healing was addressed by the Lord who could forgive sin, saying he had to have his sins forgiven. And at the end of his ministry in final moments as he was dying on the cross, he addressed the ‘repentant thief’ with the immortal words of sins forgiven, ‘today you will be with me in paradise’, but apart from the general, and retrospective, we do not see Jesus going up to people and pointing the finger.

Read John 8:11

The Pharisees may have pointed the finger about the keeping of the Sabbath, or what you shall eat or what you shall drink’, but Jesus took a different line entirely. The woman at the well would have been stoned – Jesus offers love, forgiveness and new life. In return, she immediately becomes an Evangelist.

We know from our reading of the big picture of the biblical narrative – God’s salvation history – that this new life comes (as it did in Creation and on the day of Pentecost) by the Holy Spirit. The considerable accumulated experience of Alpha today, illustrates this point well. Transformation comes from the work Holy Spirit – who then convicts and deals with sin in his own time. So cohabiting couples on an Alpha weekend are not split up in to separate bedrooms – no comment is made even – but it is surprising how many become Christians and get married later on. Our task is not to point the finger at people ‘living in sin’ but to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Sharing faith the Jesus way involves helping people to repent, rather than just telling them.

For a fuller account of ‘repent’ in the gospel of Jesus, read the books and see the website.

Imagine standing in a circle. Jesus faces us all, one at a time, as individuals. His message points in all directions, like the points of a compass. He speaks to us all individually, with an aspect of the big picture of the gospel message most relevant to us – as we are now.

READ God so loved the world that (Jim), who believes in him, should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

You are the messengers. Follow the master. Amen

Top 50 texts

1. Repent and believe in the good news. (Mark 1:15)

2. Follow me. (Matthew 4: 19)

3. Blessed is the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5: 3) (or ‘you who are poor’ in Luke 6: 20)

4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5: 6)

5. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. (Matthew 5: 8)

6. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)

7. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5: 10)

8. Beware of practicing piety before others in order to be seen by them ..your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6: 1 – 4)

9. Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6: 33)

10. Do no judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. (Luke 6: 37, 38)

11. Ask and it will be given you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7: 7, 8 and Luke 11: 9,10)

12. Son, your sins are forgiven. (Mark 2: 5)

13. The one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10: 22 and Matthew 24:13)

14. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24b)

15. Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11: 28 – 30)

16. Love you enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. (Luke 6:35)

17. Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matthew 18: 3, 4).

18. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. (Mark 9: 38)

19. No-one who puts their hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9: 62)

20. ‘Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters’. Mt 12:30

21. Jesus is asked, ‘Lord will only a few be saved? He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and not be able’. (Luke 13: 23 – 24)

22. When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. (Luke 14: 13,14)

23. ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No-one is good but God alone. You know the Commandments: You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother’. He said to him, ‘Teacher I have kept all these since my youth’. Jesus, looking at him , loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’. (Mk 10:17 – 21)

24. ‘to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father’ (Matthew 20: 23)

25. ‘For many are called but few are chosen’ (Matthew 22: 14)

26. ‘Teacher’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself’. And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live’. (Luke 10: 25 – 28)

27. Then he will say to those on his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me’. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’ (Matthew 25: 41 -- 46)

28. ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise’. (Luke 23: 42, 43)

29. ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them’. (Matthew 28: 20 and John 14: 23b)

30. I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. (John 3: 5)

31. Everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3: 15, 16 and 36 addition)

32. Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4: 14)

33. Do not be amazed at this, for the time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5: 28)

34. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you. (John 6: 27)

35. What must we do to do the work which God requires? ‘The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent. (John 6: 29)

36. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never go thirsty. (John 6: 35)

37. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (Jn 6: 40)

38. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6: 44)

39. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6: 54)

40. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (John 8:12)

41. I told you that you would die in your sins, if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins. (John 8: 24)

42. If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8: 31, 32)

43. I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is s slave to sin. .. so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8: 24, 36)

44. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10: 9)

45. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I will give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. (John 10: 27, 28)

46. I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (John 11: 25, 26)

47. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. (John 12: 25)

48. I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14: 6)

49. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14: 23)

50. Now this is eternal life: they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17: 1 – 3)