

KNOW &

TELL

THE GOSPEL

John Chapman

For most believers, clearly sharing the Christian gospel with someone is more of a dream than a reality. We feel inadequate and reluctant—but we absolutely want to see our friends come to know Jesus.

Filled with the heart and humour of John Chapman, who had 50 years of experience in evangelism and ministry, *Know and Tell the Gospel* deals with all the questions that quickly come to mind:

- Just what is the gospel anyway?
- Is it my job to explain it to people?
- What is God's role and what is mine?
- Where does church fit in?
- Why is evangelism so often hard?
- How can we train ourselves and others to be involved?

A must-read for every Christian who is keen to take the gospel to our lost world.

 **matthiasmedia**
your partner in making disciples

ISBN 978-1-875245-73-4



9 781875 245734

Know and Tell the Gospel

John Chapman

 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

Know and Tell the Gospel

Fifth edition

© Matthias Media 2020

First edition 1981

Second edition 1987

Third edition 1998

Fourth edition 2005

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used by permission.

ISBN 978 1 875245 73 4

Cover design by Judy Dao.

Typesetting by Lankshear Design.

Contents

Preface..... 5

Part I Knowing why

1. What! Another one? 9
2. What is the gospel? 15
3. The gospel and the kingdom of God 29
4. Who should do the work of evangelism? 41
5. Why should we bother? 59
6. Who does what? God's work and ours 71
7. Why doesn't God choose everyone? 85
8. The minister, the church and evangelism..... 93
9. Why is evangelism always so hard?..... 109

Part II Knowing how

10. Person-to-person evangelism..... 123
11. Training yourself and others..... 135
12. Power for evangelism 205

Appendices

1. Preaching evangelistic sermons..... 219
2. Reading list..... 233

Preface

When I first wrote *Know and Tell the Gospel* some 18 years ago, I had a couple of basic goals in mind.

Firstly, I wanted to encourage Christians to get involved in sharing the gospel of Jesus with their friends. I wanted to tell them that although the task is not always easy—in fact it is often very difficult—it is an immensely rewarding privilege that God has granted to all his people through the gospel.

Following on from this, I wanted to argue that the role of the pastor is both to be an evangelist and to equip his people for the evangelistic task; that the local church is to be a training centre, where individual Christians are taught and encouraged to be involved in the gospel enterprise.

These basic goals haven't changed. In fact, with the passing of the years I am convinced even more that it is the joyous privilege of all Christians to be involved in evangelism, and that our churches do not do nearly enough to encourage, teach and train their people for this task.

In this new edition, apart from minor updates and corrections, I have added quite a lot of extra material in chapter 4 relating to 'who does the job'—that is, whether all Christians are called to be involved in sharing the

gospel, or only some. I have also extensively revised chapter 11 to take into account the many new resources that are now available for evangelism. Chapter 12 on ‘power for evangelism’ has also been fortified with some additional material on the place of prayer and the church.

My prayer now is what it was 18 years ago—that we will all realize afresh how kind God has been in bringing the gospel to us, and that in gratitude and love we will take the gospel to others.

August 1998

God continues to richly bless us with new resources to help us in the task of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people. This new edition mainly updates the details of such resources in chapter 11.

25 years on now, and my prayer remains the same.

August 2005

Our dear Chappo is now with the Lord, but there’s too much gold in this book not to keep it in print and keep it up to date. We’ve had to do this update without him, and have accordingly kept our touch light. We’ve removed outdated references and resources (mostly in chapter 11), and updated the reading lists in chapter 11 and appendix 2 to include more recent contributions. Otherwise, the timeless wisdom of Chappo’s insights into the gospel and evangelism are unchanged. I pray that God continues to use *Know and Tell the Gospel* to train Christians in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Emma Thornett

Managing Editor, January 2020

Part I

Knowing why

What! Another one?

A weary pilgrimage

I remember going to a weekend conference some eighteen months after I was converted, and a girl there asked me if I was a Christian. I answered, “Yes”.

“Tell me” she said, “what I have to do to become a Christian.”

I didn’t have the faintest idea where to begin.

As I write this now, I remember well the mixed emotions which swamped me. First, joy—because more than anything else I wanted to see people converted. Second, shame—because I didn’t know what to say. Third, anger—(with myself) for allowing such a situation to arise. All these emotions muddled together produced the only possible answer: “I’ll take you to someone who can tell you”.

So I did that, and she was converted—but not by my words or witness.

That incident left an indelible imprint on my memory, and that day I vowed that such a situation would never happen again. In the future I would know exactly what to say.

So I set out to learn the gospel. Which I did.

Being now thoroughly equipped, I embarked on a flurry of evangelistic activity. The family received the full blast, and a small sermon was delivered at breakfast each day for months! I remember my exasperated father saying one morning, "You don't ever eat your breakfast at church do you? Why must I always have church at breakfast?" It seems a reasonable statement as I look back on it some 30 years later, although at the time I thought it was a godless rejection of the gospel.

Such feverish activity didn't last long, it was really too hard to sustain, and I noticed that a lot of Christians were not really very concerned about evangelism. It did not seem to worry them. I got the distinct impression that I could be a Christian and not engage in evangelism at all!

Every now and again we were given a 'beat-up' on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 at church, with the result that my evangelistic activity would begin again. It didn't last long. Evangelism was not a way of life for me.

What helped the go-slow campaign was a new suggestion that the gospel I had learned was really Paul's gospel and not that of Jesus. Jesus' gospel was about the Kingdom of God. Paul's was about the death and resurrection of Jesus. I didn't really know if this constituted a real problem or not. But doubt was now cast on the validity of my gospel so it seemed better to wait until *somebody* sorted it all out.

Then I met Christians who had discovered a 'theological' reason which enabled them not to bother about evangelism. They pointed out that in Ephesians 4:11 one of the gifts which the ascended Christ had given to the Church was that of the evangelists. It was obvious that everybody was not an evangelist. If you were, you did the

work. If you weren't, you didn't have to. It was as simple as that. To give them their due they did believe that the evangelists were to be encouraged and helped by us all, but only those who had the gift had to do the work. I decided that as I found evangelism so difficult, then I obviously did not have the gift and so all I had to do was to pray for those who did. From then on, whenever I was reminded about the Great Commission to "go into all the world and preach the gospel", I immediately transferred it to the apostles to whom it was originally given and the evangelists whom Christ had provided. It had no direct application to me.

In spite of this I was still uneasy. I felt that I should be trying to lead people to Christ, although now I didn't know why. But every time I tried, it was so hard that I concluded I did not have the gift.

Someone encouraged me to do evangelism by the suggestion that, although we were not all evangelists, we were all to be "witnesses" and as such were obliged to take the gospel to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It seemed like a good reason until I decided, when I read that verse in its context in the Acts of the Apostles, that the *witnesses* were really those who *had witnessed* Jesus Christ's *resurrection* from the dead. Once again I didn't qualify!

Confusion was now made greater by my own discovery in the Bible that it was God who took the initiative in calling people back to himself. He predestined them. He drew them back—because he purposed to save them. It was a jolt. I had always thought that my will was totally free and that I had chosen God as mine, not the reverse. This had ramifications in the area of evangelism. I reasoned that, since God had chosen the elect, he would most surely call them to himself. Doing the work of

leading people to Christ seemed less important than I had thought.

Little by little I seemed to find more reasons for doing less.

After I was ordained as a minister I decided that my role was one of a pastor/teacher and not an evangelist. I was to concentrate my efforts and energies on God's people, the Christians. Others would have to do the work of the evangelist. Hand-in-glove with this went the idea that church was meant to build up the Christians and so was an inappropriate place for evangelism.

Thank goodness there were those people who were not deterred by any of this. They plodded on, leading their friends and neighbours to Christ. However when I asked for a biblical reason for this, I was generally given an inadequate or incorrect one.

Why another book?

Some of these problems I resolved sooner than others, and have come to the point where I am convinced that the Bible clearly states the gospel. I have come to understand that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is not really different from the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for forgiveness of sins. In spite of the specific gift to the Church of the evangelist, and the command of the Great Commission given to the apostles, the Bible teaches that *all* Christians are to directly engage in evangelism.

The Bible also teaches that the individual Christian, not the Church, is the unit for evangelism. To do this work, we all need to be strongly motivated by God's word. The ordained minister is to be the pastor/teacher of his congregation and as such needs to evangelize, train and encourage the members in this work—as well as doing it

himself. The Bible says that even though God does initiate evangelism, and he does call people to himself, our part in telling the gospel is very real and significant.

I still find evangelism difficult, but I am not discouraged by that. The Bible has shown me that it is a fairly common difficulty, rather than an indication that I do not have some special gift which would make it easier.

Over the 27 years I worked in the Department of Evangelism of the Anglican Church in Sydney, I encountered such problems many times. I know that there are many people whose experience is parallel to mine and I am writing this book to show how we can arrive at the position where evangelism should become a way of life. It is God's will for *all* his people.

This book is in two parts. In the first, I have set out to show what the Bible says on the questions mentioned earlier. Only a clear biblical perspective on evangelism will enable us to have a proper Christian practice in evangelism.

The second part deals with practical aspects of doing and training ourselves and others for evangelism. It has been a surprise and joy to me to see how the most unlikely people have become effective in evangelism through careful training, especially when time was taken to find a method which was suited to the individual's gifts.

The very word 'evangelism' intimidates some people. It conjures up pictures of emotional meetings where people are manipulated into doing things which in more sober moments they would never dream of doing. Others have had unpleasant experiences of being 'button-holed' by insensitive bores who have talked loudly and at length. The thought of having to become one of them fills most people with dread.

WHAT! ANOTHER ONE?

When I use the term ‘evangelism’ I am talking about the process whereby a person tells other people the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ with a view to persuading them to put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Whether that telling is a simple chat over coffee or preaching to a hundred thousand makes no difference. Methods vary with people’s abilities to use them.

This book is written to help us all find where we, with our gifts and opportunities, fit into the ongoing work of evangelism.

What is the gospel?

The gospel and the method

Any book on evangelism must begin with the gospel. An understanding of the gospel governs the way we engage in evangelism. A right understanding of the gospel should lead to right methods; an inadequate understanding will inevitably lead to inadequate practices. A wrong view of the gospel will lead to unhelpful and incorrect ways of doing evangelism.

There are many clear statements of the gospel in the pages of the Bible, but I have chosen the opening verses of the epistle to the Romans because it is stated so clearly. It answers three basic questions:

1. What is the gospel?
2. What response am I looking for to the gospel?
3. For whom is the gospel intended?

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (Romans 1:1-5)

What is the gospel?

Notice in this passage what the apostle tells us about the nature of the gospel.

(a) The gospel is God's

Paul tells us that he is “set apart for the gospel of God” (verse 1). The gospel has its origin in God. He is the first evangelist (Galatians 3:8). The gospel which Jesus preached is described in exactly the same way (Mark 1:14). No-one, not even the Lord Jesus, is at liberty to make up their own gospel. The gospel has its origin in God the Father. He is its author and he alone is able to state its content. This fact is both challenging and comforting to any person who preaches the gospel.

Since God has stated the gospel, then care must be taken to make sure I have rightly understood it. That is the challenge. The gospel is a powerful message (Romans 1:16). It is powerful because it comes from God. However, something which is *like* the gospel but isn't the gospel at all, will lack any power to affect the lives of men and women in any permanent way.

The gospel is God's gospel—he is its author and he states its content—and what a relief that is. We don't have to take the responsibility for the reactions of people to it. We didn't make it up! All we have to do is pass on a message. We will have to take full responsibility for the

way we tell people the gospel but *not the content*. I heard of an undergraduate student who was so outraged by the gospel that he verbally attacked a Christian over the nature of the gospel. The Christian explained to the student that he must take that matter up with a much higher authority since it was not his gospel, but God's gospel. It is a challenge and a relief.

(b) The gospel is not new

"...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (verse 2). Paul is at pains to show that the gospel he preaches, God's gospel, is not new. Indeed the gospel was promised by God beforehand through the Old Testament prophets. That which is now preached is that which God always had in mind. The way God brings people to himself has not changed (Isaiah 45; Galatians 3:8).

The gospel today is in conformity with God's continuing revelation and is the final expression of it. Jesus of Nazareth was recognized as the perfect fulfilment of all that God had foretold through the prophets about his Messiah. The aged Simeon, quoting from Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6, described the child Jesus as "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:29-32).

Peter in his sermon at the temple in Jerusalem after the healing of the crippled man at the beautiful gate (Acts 3:22), asserts that Jesus is the prophet whom Moses foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15-16.

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), Peter claims Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise in Psalm 132:11 (Acts 2:30), and that it was really Jesus of whom David had spoken in Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28).

(c) The gospel is ALL about Jesus

The gospel “regarding his Son” (verse 3). Here we come to the heart of God’s gospel. The gospel is about God’s Son. It is a truism to say that the gospel is about Jesus, but it must be said. We are so often side-tracked into thinking that the gospel is about humanity.

The gospel neither has its origin in humanity nor does it have its content in humanity. The gospel is *not* about humanity and its needs, although these are not unimportant nor are they unrelated. The gospel is all about the Son. It is about Jesus. So when I am evangelizing someone, I must be speaking about Jesus. If I am not speaking about Jesus, God’s unique Son, then I am not preaching God’s gospel. When Jesus is preaching God’s gospel he is speaking about the Kingdom of God in which he and he alone is King (Mark 1:14-15).

Why am I making so much of this? Because people so often forget it. I used to work in a department of evangelism. Many organizations sent us tracts and gospel teaching aids. These were designed to help people to evangelize their friends. I was struck with the fact that so many of these neither began with the Lord Jesus nor did they have as their main focus the Lord Jesus. It seems to me that often the unique person and the unique ministry of the Lord Jesus are not at the centre of much gospel preaching and writing today. Why is it that we rarely ‘gospel’ people with any of the *four Gospels*? Why is so much gospel preaching focused on people and their need? Could this be one of the reasons why so much evangelistic preaching today is so powerless to change lives? Because it is not God’s gospel!?! Because it is not the gospel which is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16)? When God the Father proclaims the gospel—his gospel—he speaks about the Son and so must we.

(d) The gospel is about a Man/King

“...who as to his human nature was a descendant of David” (verse 3). The two particular features which God wishes us to note about his Son are that he was truly a man and that he was also a king. He was truly Man, not just any man, a man descended from David, a king. In Jesus, God fulfilled his promise to send a king to rule over his people forever. Jesus is undoubtedly the Messiah (or Christ). Matthew begins his Gospel by establishing this, “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David” (Matthew 1:1). Luke is even more explicit in his Gospel. In relating the story of the announcement by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, the angel describes the nature of this son as the one who will be:

“...great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”
(Luke 1:32-33)

There is another significant feature about the fact that Jesus was truly human and which we should note. He *was* born in first century Palestine in Bethlehem—his mother was Mary. Luke, in his Gospel, carefully places this event in its historical setting (Luke 2:1-7). The ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus himself is set with equal care. Luke tells us:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas... (Luke 3:1-2)

This Jesus lived an extraordinary life and died and rose again. Information about him is obtained in the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The gospel is *historical*. The Jesus of history is now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. The one who was born in Bethlehem is the Lord of heaven and earth. He who died on Calvary and rose from the dead will judge the living and the dead. This same Jesus who was descended from David, will return at the end of the age.

Any other experience I may have of Jesus is not to be put forward to men and women as the gospel. My ‘experience’ of Jesus can and *must* only be understood in terms of God’s revelation of him in the Scriptures. The gospel is anchored in history. It is almost impossible to ask people to commit their lives to Jesus as Lord if they know nothing about this Jesus from the Gospels.

The gospel is about Jesus the Man. It is historical and in that sense it may be thought of as old-fashioned. It certainly isn’t new. But novelty has nothing to do with relevance. It isn’t irrelevant because it is historical. In fact the very opposite is the case. Because Jesus is truly human he understands me thoroughly. The Jesus of the Gospels is the Man who walked where I walk. He who was tempted as I am, says “come to me... and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

In an age which studies little history and puts such a high premium on experience, this aspect of the gospel is often forgotten, yet it is the ground of our assurance.

Often I feel as if living the Christian life is too difficult and I am tempted to give it all away. However I remind myself that this is just not on! Jesus Christ really *did* live. He *did* die on the cross and rise again. He *did* ascend into

heaven. I am not mistaken. There is no other life to live than the Christian life unless I ignore the facts. So I press on with it. The Jesus of my 'experience' cannot sustain me in such a moment of temptation because I am not sure if my experience is real and true. The Jesus of history can and does sustain me in such a moment because there is no doubt about his reality. He really *did* happen. The gospel is historical. It is about the Man who is Messiah.

(e) The gospel is about the powerful Son of God

"...who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (verse 4). We already know that Jesus is a king, being born a 'son of David'. But now we are told that he is indeed *the* King.

The term 'Son of God' is not to be confused with 'God the Son'. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity but that is not what is being said here. 'Son of God' is a term used by God of the Kings of Israel. In Psalm 2 God says of his king "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (verse 7). Not only is Jesus truly human but he is God's king. He has been declared so by the voice from heaven at his baptism and on the mountain when he was transfigured (Mark 1:11; Matthew 17:5).

However what is being said here is that this Jesus is the promised Messiah who would rule over God's world forever. His resurrection shows that he is the one. Psalm 16:10 tells us "you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay". It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that demonstrates with power that he is undoubtedly the one to whom this psalm referred. This king (in terms of Psalm 2:8) will have the nations for his inheritance and he will be absolute ruler of the whole

earth. No-one will be able to resist him. That is why repentance is in order. No true gospel can bypass the death and resurrection of Jesus. He died to take the punishment which our sins deserved (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). In these events he shows that he has defeated death (Hebrews 2:14-15) and the power of darkness (John 12:31-32). He has defeated his great enemy and ours (Colossians 2:13-15). He is God's powerful Son who is alive for evermore and consequently is alive now.

The Jesus of history who lived in Palestine, who ate, slept and wept, is the same Jesus who died on the cross and rose again from the dead. By that action he bore our sins and he defeated death. He ascended into heaven and he sent the Holy Spirit into the world. Through his Spirit, Jesus comes to us now in the contemporary situation and makes "everything new" (Revelation 21:5). He who *was* is he who *is*. The historical Jesus is the contemporary Jesus. He is the gospel we preach.

(f) The gospel—Jesus Christ is Lord

"...Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 4). This brings us to the heart of the gospel message.

God the Father has declared his Son, Jesus Christ, to be Lord of heaven and earth. After his death and resurrection, Jesus explains to the apostles that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). This had special significance since on an earlier occasion, Jesus had referred to the Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matthew 11:25). Since his death and resurrection, that title is now equally applicable to Jesus. *He* is Lord of heaven and earth. This simple phrase seems to be the clearest and simplest statement of the gospel message.

It is in essence what John the Baptist is saying when he

calls on men and women to recognize that “the kingdom of heaven is near” (Matthew 3:2). It is near because the coming King is near. Jesus is that King. His Kingdom is not confined to Israel. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him.

That is what the Father is saying to us. Jesus has had the “name that is above every name” conferred upon him (Philippians 2:9). He has been enthroned in heaven (Hebrews 1:3). Paul reminds the Romans that salvation is for those who confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord and those who believe in their hearts that God raised him from the dead (see Romans 10:9).

Our present day trend in evangelistic preaching to separate the Jesus who saved from the Jesus who rules is unbiblical, and because it is unbiblical, is totally unhelpful. I cannot have my sins forgiven until I acknowledge Jesus as my King. Our constant use of Revelation 3:20—however helpful the picture of restored fellowship may be—has not ultimately helped us in making clear to people the true nature of our response back to God. ‘Opening the door’ may or may not convey the idea of surrender to lordship. It will most certainly do so if the verse is expounded in its context.

Wherever in the Bible we set out to show people the gospel—whenever we are engaging in personal evangelism or speaking to groups large or small, what we must take care to do is to preach God’s gospel. God’s gospel is about Jesus—the historical/contemporary Jesus—the Jesus who died and rose again taking the punishment our sins deserved—the Jesus who is *Lord*—the Jesus who is King in the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 25:31-33; Luke 4:43).

What is the response to the gospel?

In Romans 1, the response is “...to call people... to the obedience that comes from faith” (verse 5). Once we grasp the fact that the gospel is not a system of doctrine, but the person of Jesus Christ, then we will find that so many other questions fall into place. When we grasp the fact that God has declared his Son Jesus to be Lord of heaven and earth, then we are left with only two alternatives. We can accept it and fall before him in repentance and faith, or we can reject him as our rightful ruler and continue in sin.

The Bible makes it clear that all people have rebelled against the rightful rule of Jesus over their lives (Romans 3:12). We all wish to be independent and run our own lives, our own way (Genesis 3:4). We are all under the judgement of God (Romans 1:18; John 3:36) and that is why he calls all people everywhere to repent (Romans 6:15-16; Acts 17:30). Paul is clear as to the response towards which he is preaching. He says that his apostolic ministry is geared to call people “...to the obedience that comes from faith” (verse 5).

Repentance and faith are the only proper responses to God’s gospel. God has declared that his Son is Lord. However, I discover through the gospel that I am a rebel; I don’t want Jesus to rule over me. I discover from the gospel that I am under the judgement of God for this rebellion, and there is only one reasonable way to act. I repent of that wilful rebellion in an act of surrender. I acknowledge Jesus as my Lord because God has declared him to be *the* Lord. However that alone does not deal with the fact that I have been a rebel. What is to happen about the past? There is only one logical course open to me. I throw myself before God and ask for mercy. I put myself at his mercy and he, in his mercy, forgives me

because of the death of his Son Jesus on my behalf.

The true Christian response to the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus which issues in obedience (repentance). No repentance is true repentance which does not recognize Jesus as Lord over every area of life. No faith is genuine which believes that something extra needs to be added to the death of Jesus to make me acceptable to God. It is not possible to be rescued from the penalty of sin by the death of Jesus while I remain a rebel to Jesus; and equally, I am not acceptable to God if I try to stop rebelling but do not trust in the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. I may *not* have Jesus as my Saviour if I will not acknowledge him as my Lord. Jesus is able to save us because he is Lord (Colossians 2:13-15). For too long we have divided the Lord Jesus' twin functions, those of Saviour and Lord. It may be legitimate to do that for a descriptive purpose, but it is unhelpful to think about the *work* of Jesus apart from the *person* of Jesus.

The modern tendency to ask people to respond to the gospel by 'opening your heart and letting Jesus in', or 'let Jesus come in and cleanse you from your sin', will leave a person completely open to every possible misunderstanding.

Contrast it with the robust call which must have come from the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians.

He rejoices that they have turned to God from idols to serve a true and living God (repentance), and were waiting for his Son from heaven, Jesus who delivers from the wrath to come (faith) (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10). Why did they respond like this? *Because it was part of Paul's gospel preaching.* They could not become Christians unless they turned their backs on idolatry in all its forms. But that in itself would be useless unless they placed their

trust and confidence in the Jesus who died and rose for them, the Jesus who was coming in judgement and would deliver them from God's anger. There is only one way they could have known this. *Paul told them when he preached the gospel to them.*

Our current lack of clarity at this point has left many people in confusion for years during their Christian life. The way we respond initially to the gospel is the way we are meant to proceed. Repentance and faith are to become our way of life, but they will become so only if we begin that way.

Our churches are graveyards of people who on one hand 'opened the door' but have never repented; they have never come to terms with Christ's lordship. On the other hand, there are those hard-hearted men and women who in a pseudo-repentance have 'cleaned up their lives' but are affronted by the idea that they need mercy from God and that they are totally unacceptable to God except through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul describes the response for which he preached in these terms—"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). The promise of salvation is linked with confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised him from the dead (see Romans 10:9). Have you noticed in the Bible how often we are called upon to respond to Jesus *as* Lord (who will save us), but never as Saviour *without* Lord? (see Luke 2:11, 23:42; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9; Colossians 2:6; etc.). How is it possible to be a member of the Kingdom of God (or heaven), without acknowledging Jesus as the King?

This matter will be discussed further in chapter 3.

For whom is the gospel intended?

“...from among all the Gentiles” (verse 5). As we recognize the gospel in terms of Jesus Christ being Lord of heaven and earth, we will immediately see that the extent of the gospel is limitless. Since there is no-one who is outside Christ’s authority, then all must be told.

If I paddle a canoe up the Amazon, Ganges, Murray or Thames Rivers and ask myself the question “Is Jesus really Lord here?”, the answer is clear. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and therefore he is Lord here. Then it is obvious that the inhabitants need to be told this so that they can repent and submit their lives to Christ’s authority and thereby put their trust in him.

I do not question the sincerity of the beliefs of other people, nor that they hold them with tenacity, but the question in the end is: “Has God spoken?” Has he really told us the gospel about his Son? Is it true that Jesus is in fact Lord of heaven and earth? Is he seated now on the right hand of the throne of the majesty on high? Is it a fact that Jesus will return as judge of all people? If these are indeed facts, then it is inadequate to be a Muslim, or a Buddhist, or a materialist—however sincerely one may hold such beliefs.

A true appreciation of the gospel in terms of Jesus Christ as a person (and not just as a worker), who lived a perfect life, who died the sin-bearing death, who rose to justify us, who is seated in heaven and who will judge all people, will undoubtedly correct any wrong and inadequate views of both response and the extent of our preaching. As we meditate on him who is *so very* impressive, it will become a very strong incentive to proclaim him to all people.

Have you ever noticed in fiction that real people are

never completely good or completely bad, but the good and bad are mixed together? Have you noticed that when people are portrayed to us as being completely good, they are never 'real' people, but 'cardboard cut-outs'?

It is impressive that when we read the Gospels, the Jesus we encounter is both completely good and still real. He is at one and the same time thoroughly good and thoroughly believable. The Gospel writers have given us an account of Jesus which is very impressive. We need to re-read the Gospels frequently so that our gospel is a full one and our mental picture of Jesus is a real one. We need to be gripped with the wonder of *who Jesus is* as well as by *what Jesus did*.

It can be argued that what I have said is a Pauline way of looking at the gospel. But what of the gospel which Jesus preached? His gospel centred on the Kingdom of God. Are the two gospels basically different? If they are not, then what is the relationship between the 'gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins' as Paul preaches it (1 Corinthians 15:3-5), and the 'gospel of the Kingdom of God' as Jesus preaches it (Mark 1:15)?

This is the subject of the next chapter.