

The momentous news of the gospel

(Richard Chin – AFES National Director)

The Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) stands or falls on the ‘evangel’, the momentous *gospel* of Jesus. Our generation however is in danger of *assuming* what this gospel is. If what is taught in one generation becomes assumed in the second generation, then it will be forgotten in the third generation before being denied in the fourth generation. We can *assume* what this gospel is to our peril, or joyfully teach it to every generation for the glory of our Lord Jesus. Only he abolishes death and brings life and immortality to light through his gospel.

1. The gospel is *momentous news*¹.

The word ‘gospel’ (euangelion² in NT Greek) is not a religious word but a media word for “news”. It is not just any news however, because it is the kind of news that changes the world. It is momentous. It demands a response. The outcome of World War 2, the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the death of Queen Elizabeth II, constitute such ‘gospels’.

In the ancient world, these gospels arrived through a messenger (Gk:angelos). Pheidippides was the famous ‘gospeller’ who ran forty-two kilometres from the battlefield of Marathon to Athens to proclaim: “Rejoice, we have won!”³ When Isaiah proclaimed *the* gospel 300 years earlier he said: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news (gospel)” (Isaiah 52:7).

But *the* gospel is only *good* momentous news when it is proclaimed in the context of judgment. Paul wrote: “... on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus” (Romans 2:16). Part and parcel of *the* gospel is news of judgment!⁴ We can only appreciate how good the good news is when we understand how bad the bad news is.⁵ Our sin is so offensive to God that we deserve his wrath. The momentous good news for all is the offer of rescue from his wrath. However, the *focus* of the gospel is not on our rescue, but on our *rescuer*.

2. The gospel is momentous news that focuses on Jesus

In short, the gospel declares, “Jesus is the Christ”. ‘Christ’ is not his surname (like ‘Smith’). The Greek word for ‘Christ’ is synonymous with the Hebrew word for ‘Messiah,’ and the English term ‘anointed one’. They are all titles referring to God’s rule as *the* King.

¹ This article is greatly indebted to an unpublished paper by Tim Thorburn: “What is the gospel” written for the AFES senior staff conference 2009.

² Literally (in Greek) ‘eu’ means ‘well’, and ‘angelo’ means ‘I announce’. So ‘euangelion’ more accurately means ‘news well told’.

³ This gave rise to the Olympic marathon. According to tradition, Pheidippides immediately collapsed and died having run a further 280 km in the preceding 2 days to deliver other important ‘gospels’ in the battle.

⁴ See also Luke 3:16-18, Rev 14:6-7

⁵ To *never* speak of judgement is ultimately to preach a different gospel.

That's why the gospeller with beautiful feet proclaimed: "Your God *reigns*" (Isaiah 52:7). The Old Testament continually looked forward to the day when God would establish his Kingdom to deal with the seriousness of our sin, and save his people by defeating and judging his enemies. This was foreshadowed through the reign of King David ⁶, the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar ⁷, and the prophecies of Isaiah ⁸ just to mention a few examples.

So when Jesus *evangelised*, he announced: "... the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The time of waiting is over. Jesus is the courier with beautiful feet. But above all, **Jesus is the Christ because of his death, resurrection, and ascension. He was enthroned when he ascended to his Father's side and poured out his Spirit.** This gospel demands belief (trust), and repentance. This gospel is worth losing your life for (Mk 8:34-35).

The gospel is the momentous good news that focuses on Jesus.

This is precisely why the first four books of the New Testament are called "the Gospel *according to*," Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! They are four accounts of the ONE gospel that record Jesus' kingly and loving authority over hunger, sickness, demons, storms, death, and ultimately sin. They climax in the events that *establish* Jesus' kingly authority, his death and resurrection.

So when the apostles proclaim the gospel in the book of Acts they expose idols by focussing on Jesus' loving rule as the *resurrected* Christ.⁹ When the gospel is summarised in the epistles they focus on the message of the Cross,¹⁰ or Jesus' kingly Davidic origins and resurrection,¹¹ or Jesus' ultimate glory as Lord.¹²

The closest credal summary of the gospel is found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-6. ¹³

Now I would remind you brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures
that he was buried*

*that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
and that he appeared to Peter and to the twelve."*

⁶ See for example 2 Samuel 7, Psalms 2 & 10

⁷ Daniel 2 where God reveals he will break into history to replace the kingdoms of men with his own.

⁸ E.g. Isaiah 9:1-7

⁹ E.g. Acts 2:36, 3:17-21, 10:34-43, 15:35, 17:1-4, 22-31

¹⁰ E.g. 2 Cor 1:17-2:5 where Paul speaks of the "message of the Cross", "Christ crucified", and of "Jesus Christ and him crucified".

¹¹ E.g. Rom 1:1-5, & 2 Tim 2:8 : "descended from David". This also alludes to Psalm 2, & 2 Samuel 7.

¹² 2 Cor 4:4

¹³ Scholars regard these verses as the earliest 'creed' in Christianity that was passed on to Paul as early as AD 34, a few years after Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus is identified as the “Christ” (the title that captures all that the Scriptures say about the King of God’s Kingdom). The historical facts are that **he died and was buried**. Yet according to the Scriptures, he died *for our sins*.¹⁴ In love, he died *for us* to turn aside his Father’s wrath.¹⁵ He died as our substitute to save us from an eternal hell.

Also, in accordance with the Scriptures, he **rose on the third day** to rule with all authority in heaven and on earth, and he will one day come to judge the living and the dead! As such his death and resurrection have irreversibly changed the destiny of the universe. And those who especially testify to this interpretation of these concrete historical events are the twelve (eyewitness!) apostles.

This gospel is the momentous news that **Jesus is the Christ**. It is this gospel that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). It is this gospel that is worth living, suffering, and dying for (2 Tim 1:8, 2:8-10). It is this gospel that must be guarded (2 Tim 1:14), and taught to every generation (2 Tim 2:1). It is this gospel that must be proclaimed to the world (Rom 10:14-18). Thus, if we preach a different gospel, we deserve to be condemned! (Gal 1:9).

That’s why it is so important to know what the gospel is NOT.

1. The gospel is *not* about our response.

Although the gospel calls on us to trust Jesus and turn back to him as King (Mk 1:15), our response is not the gospel. Rather, our response of faith and repentance constitute the necessary *fruit* of the gospel.

Even obeying the greatest commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love your neighbour as yourself (Mk 12:28-34) is the necessary fruit of the gospel, but *not* the gospel.

The gospel is momentous news about Jesus the Christ, not our response.

2. The gospel is *not* about social justice.

God commands us to right injustices (Isa 2, Amos); care for the vulnerable (1 Tim 5), and love the needy (1 Jn 3). To neglect the poor and vulnerable is a grievous sin. Seeking social justice is as important as being faithful to your spouse. To neglect the poor and needy is as serious a sin as committing adultery!

But at the end of the day, social justice is not the gospel. It is the necessary *fruit* of the gospel, but not the gospel.

As Don Carson rightly concludes:

Failure to distinguish between the gospel and all the effects of the gospel tends, on the long haul, to replace the good news as to what

¹⁴ The *fact* is that Jesus ‘died’. The *interpretation* is that he died ‘for our sins’.

¹⁵ Rom 5:8-9, Mk 14:32-42.

God has done with a moralism that is finally without the power and the glory of Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended, and reigning¹⁶..

My first wife Bronwyn died of pancreatic cancer on Easter Sunday 2013. When we first heard the diagnosis three years earlier, it was news that radically changed our lives. We agonizingly lived in the valley of the shadow of death. Yet what sustained us through the pain was *the* gospel.

We were overwhelmingly blessed with the *fruit* of the gospel. Our church and school families sacrificially provided us with daily meals. Our AFES family cared for my work responsibilities. Brothers and sisters from every corner of the world wrote regularly and prayed constantly for us. We literally could not have survived without their sacrificial Christ-like love. We cannot thank God enough for them.

However only in the gospel, did we know that the glorious rule of Jesus meant that nothing (like cancer) happens randomly. Only in the gospel could we bathe in God's love at the cross. Only in the gospel could we look forward to Jesus' return when his Kingdom intervenes to irreversibly deal with sin. Only in the gospel can we see fellow sinners saved from hell. Only in the gospel is death abolished, and life and immortality brought to light. Only in the gospel can we know that Bronwyn is now more alive than ever in the presence of Jesus.

Through gospel eyes, sin gets uglier, grace gets bigger, Jesus gets greater, his death becomes more wonderful, and his resurrection gets more astounding. Although it does not remove our pain in this age, the gospel sustains us to live for Jesus as the Christ in this age, and the age to come.

That's why AFES must stand or fall on *the* gospel. What better news is there to proclaim? What better news is there to live and die for? The gospel is the momentous news that Jesus is the Christ. Small wonder that at his birth, the angel proclaimed:

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

¹⁶ D.A. Carson –Themelios Editorial, Volume 34, Issue 1, April 2009. This can be viewed at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications/34-1/editorial/>