

## 7. Announcing the Good News of the Kingdom

We have focused on **Seeing** people, **Having** compassion on them, and **Reflecting** the kingdom to them. Over time, these will give us opportunities to **Announce** the kingdom to people. We will spend multiple weeks on this important and challenging aspect of Jesus' ministry and also expect to continue to learn about it for the rest of our lives.

### Teaching and Proclaiming

Our key passage summarizes Jesus' ministry as going, "through all the towns and villages, *teaching* in their synagogues, *proclaiming* (or announcing) the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness" (Matthew 9:35). Scholars distinguish between teaching and proclaiming, in both Jesus' ministry and that of the early church. **Proclaiming** refers especially to telling the good news of Christ and the kingdom to people who are *not yet* followers of Jesus. **Teaching** refers especially to describing the truths and way of life that are to be adopted by those who *have* decided to follow Jesus. Proclaiming is about what God has done. Teaching tells the implications for our lives.

There are two primary words for the **proclaiming** aspect. One is *kerusso* (to publish, proclaim, announce openly and publicly as a herald, preach, 61x). Notice the word may be translated as preach, but only rarely does the word refer to what pulpit ministers do in our church services today. Rather, the preaching or proclaiming in the New Testament almost always refers to proclaiming the kingdom and the King to those who are not followers of Christ in settings outside of church. The word tells us that there is an announcement or proclamation being made.

The other key word for the proclaiming aspect of SHAREing the kingdom is *euangelizomai* (to announce good tidings, tell good news, 54x). It is the source of our English word evangelize, which also means to tell good news. For reasons too detailed to discuss here, this word, too, is sometimes translated preach. This is unfortunate because we may confuse it with *kerusso*, above. Instead of preaching, however, the gist of this word is telling good news to those who haven't heard it. This word tells us that the message being told is a good one.

There are several other less common words for communicating the message to those outside of Christ as well. Some of them are testify, declare, reason, prove, persuade, speak and teach. Each of these has a difference nuance, and there is room for all of them. In the SHARE acronym, **Announcing** the kingdom refers to communicating the message about Christ

*to those who are not yet his followers* in all these various ways. The numbers of times the words are used indicates that this is especially to be done by *announcing* and *telling the good news* of what God has done.

All this is in distinction to the **teaching** or instruction that is to be given to people who have already become believers. Again, a variety of words is used to describe what believers need to hear, including teach, exhort, rebuke, reprove, correct, encourage, counsel, etc. Again, each word has a different nuance, but together they are all aimed at helping Christians mature in Christ and live according to his teachings. In the **SHARE** acronym, I used the words **Explaining/Equipping** to refer to all these various ways of teaching, maturing and building up believers in their faith and lifestyle.

My study of all these words for teaching and proclaiming has led me to believe it is valid to make a significant distinction between them, but it is not a 100% clear cut distinction. For example, very occasionally the word proclaim seems to refer to the instructing of believers in the way of the Lord (like 2 Timothy 4:2). And sometimes teach seems to describe telling the good news about what God has done to non-Christian audiences (Acts 5:42). A Venn diagram illustrates the overlap and the distinction.



The primary point and value of all this is to recognize that those outside of Christ especially need to hear the good news about God's kingdom and the identity and work of Christ. Those already in Christ need to be instructed and urged to live lives worthy of the gospel.

At the risk of confusion, however, we also need to recognize, that Scripture often re-states the gospel to people who are already Christians. This is obviously not so they can come to Christ. Rather, it does this as a basis or guide for encouraging believers to live right in light of the gospel. One classic example is that Paul summarizes the gospel at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15, not so that his readers could be saved, but as a basis for correcting their confusion about resurrection. Another example is that Paul tells the gospel story to the Philippians (2:5-11) as a basis for the attitudes Christians should have toward one another. The beliefs and ethical instruction given to Christians are based on the gospel that originally saved them. The gospel is the power for the salvation of non-Christians and also a pattern and motivation for how Christians are to live.

### How to Clarify the Message Non-Christians Need to Hear

Our primary concern in the Announcing the News of the Kingdom aspect of Empowering Subjects is to speak the message non-Christians need to hear. We all have a basic grasp of what that good news is. But since we are called to proclaim this message clearly (Colossians 4:4) and faithfully (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), we need to prepare (1 Peter 3:15). The following is intended to help us prepare well to speak the message non-Christians need.

There is no single statement of the gospel that is the correct one for all people and situations. Rather, we see the gospel summarized and spelled out in some different ways, depending on the situation (carefully compare, for example Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5; 2 Timothy 2:8). Clearly there are some key components of the gospel. The gospel is about certain things and not others. Yet at the same time, not all aspects of it are told on every occasion.

If I wanted to know how the gospel should be spoken to Christians as a basis for how they should live (see above), I'd turn to the letters. But to clarify the message we have been commissioned to speak to non-Christians, I would begin with Jesus, as we have been doing throughout, and then turn especially to Acts. By starting with Jesus' single-minded proclamation of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1), we see something we sometimes miss—that the kingdom was proclaimed to non-Christians in Acts as well (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The primary emphasis in the messages to non-Christians in Acts, however, is the King himself, Jesus (2:36; 5:42; 17:3; 18:5, 28), and the profound events at the end of Jesus' life—his death and resurrection (2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30). I believe it is sound to clarify the message we are to speak to non-Christians by beginning with Jesus and emphasizing Acts. But this may lead to a slightly different emphasis in evangelism than what we usually do.

1. The kingdom was the primary theme of the message Jesus announced, and it was also proclaimed in Acts (see vv. in paragraph above). How can the theme of God's Kingdom (Christ reigning as King) be a part of the message we communicate to non-Christians?
  
2. Look carefully at the way Peter preached the good news to the people in Acts 2 and answer these T-F questions:
  - a. The point he makes about Jesus' ministry is that Jesus' miracles were a way of God accrediting Jesus (v. 22)(to accredit is to sanction, testify to, approve of).
  - b. Peter says you (Jews) put Jesus to death with help of wicked men (the Romans)(v. 23)
  - c. Peter specifically and directly says that Christ died for our sins (v. 23)
  - d. Peter says Jesus' death was according to God's plan (v. 23)
  - e. Peter says God is the one who raised Jesus from the dead (v. 24).
  - f. Peter quotes Scripture and interprets it to mean that the Messiah would be raised from the dead (vv. 25-32).
  - g. Jesus has been exalted to God's right hand (vv. 33-34).
  - h. The point to which Peter was driving is that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah (or Christ)(v. 36)
  - i. Peter said every one of them should repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (v. 38).
  - j. Baptism is in the name of Jesus Christ (v. 38)
  - k. Those who got baptized would also receive the Spirit and be "added to their number" (vv. 38, 41).
  - l. The effect of the message was that those who accepted it were devoted to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer (v. 42)
  
3. Based *only* on what you see here in Acts 2, how would you summarize the message we are to speak to non-Christians?

Based on much careful study, beginning with the message of the kingdom Jesus preached, focusing on the way the message was proclaimed to non-Christians in Acts, and then feeding in the other summaries of the gospel throughout the entire New Testament, I have developed a way of communicating the message that I believe is faithful to what Scripture tells us and also readily accessible to those who want to speak it. You heard it in the video, but I'll share it here in writing, just as if I were telling the news to a friend, sitting at Starbucks. Notice my presentation of the gospel is the form of an announcement or news.

*Jesus is the King of the universe. He went around healing people and delivering them from the ways Satan was tormenting them. God enabled Jesus to do these miracles and signs to testify that Jesus is the rightful ruler of us all. But the people in his day didn't recognize him as the King. He didn't meet their expectations, and he made them uncomfortable about the way they were living. So they rejected him, turned him over to the Roman authorities and demanded that he be executed as a criminal, which meant crucifixion. Such a death was so humiliating that it would have been difficult to see Jesus as a King, but actually his suffering and death were all a part of God's plan. Then, on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead! This remarkable feat showed that Jesus did in fact have God's favor! God cleared him of blame and set his seal of approval on him! The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus really is the King! He's the Lord! He's the Son of God! He is the ultimate authority in the universe! This is fantastic news! For one, it means that at long last we have a truly good and worthy leader to rule over us. He is wise, true, authentic, and just. And he is merciful! He will forgive us for all the times we have ignored him or gone against him. Like any good King, he also faced our Enemy, the Devil, and defeated him. What's more, you don't have to be good enough or qualify for his kingdom. Anyone and everyone who is willing to submit to his rule is welcome. But he does demand complete loyalty. We have to humble ourselves, change our hearts and lives and be born again of water and Spirit. One day Jesus will come back to destroy the Tyrant once and for all, and then his own kingdom will be absolute and unrivaled. But he wants us to decide now. If you want to be a part of his kingdom, you have to give him your total allegiance.*

Notice that I am announcing the gospel as a story. It is news—good news—of something remarkable that God did. The key parts of the story are the historical events of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection. To help us heed Peter's instructions to always be prepared to give an account of the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15-16), let me clarify and explain the five key "scenes" in this way of telling the gospel story. Hopefully this will help us remember it and understand it better.

1. Jesus' Ministry. God accredited Jesus as his Chosen One or King by the miracles God enabled him to do in his ministry (Acts 2:22; 10:38). Not every proclamation of the message in Acts contains this, but some do. I like to include it because it brings in the key theme of the kingdom, tells at least a little bit about Jesus personally, and introduces the basic thesis that Jesus is the Christ or King.
2. Jesus' Death. Jesus was not accepted as God's chosen One but rather was rejected and killed. This is a key event in the gospel story. They emphasized that people didn't recognize Jesus and so had him killed. Yet this was part of God's plan (Acts 2:23; 3:13-15; 10:39; 13:27-28).
3. Jesus' Resurrection and Identity. God raised Jesus from the dead, proving that he is indeed utterly unique and special. They say this with words like Christ, King, Lord, Cornerstone, Son of God, Savior, Prince, or Judge (2:24, 36; 3:13, 15; 4:10-11; 5:30-31, 42; 10:40-42; 13:30; 17:30). God raising Jesus from the dead is also a central point of the gospel. It is a most powerful way of telling who Jesus is—the Son of God, the Lord, the Christ (Romans 1:1-4; 10:8-9; cf. Acts 17:18).
4. Good News. That Jesus is God's Chosen One is good news for a number of reasons including the very fact that God has come to reign over us as our king, that he is a merciful Savior, and that he welcomes anyone and everyone who comes to him (2:38-39; 3:19; 4:12; 5:31; 10:34-35; 13:26, 32, 38-39). We can probably think of additional reasons why Jesus is good news as well.
5. Response. We need to repent, put our faith in Jesus, and be baptized in his name (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:47-48; 13:39; 17:30). Anyone is welcome to be a part of Christ's kingdom, if they give him their total loyalty. The response that Jesus and the spokespersons in Acts most commonly called for when they proclaimed the message is repentance (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; 6:12; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20).

### Important Observations about the Message

First, I'm convinced that the most specific point we are trying to make when we tell other people God's message is that Jesus is that Jesus is the ultimate authority in the universe (#3). We could also say that God the Father is the ultimate authority, but for now, God has placed all authority in Jesus' hands (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ephesians 1:19-23).

When the spokespersons in Acts proclaimed Jesus' unparalleled authority to non-Christians, they used a variety of words, including Christ, Messiah, King, Lord, Son of God, Prince, Savior, Judge, Cornerstone, and others. All these are words of great authority. The royal authority of Jesus is the same point Jesus was trying to communicate in his own ministry of proclaiming (**A**nnouncing) and demonstrating (**R**eflecting) the kingdom. At the end of his ministry, he was then "glorified" (John 12:23; 17:1; Acts 3:13) and "exalted" to God's right hand (John 12:32; Acts 2:23; 5:31), the place of highest honor and authority. On the first occasion when Jesus' followers proclaimed the message about him, Peter drove deliberately to this primary point, introduced by "therefore": that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The identity of Jesus continues to be the key way the message is summarized throughout Acts (5:31; 8:5, 12; 9:20; 10:42; 17:3). Similarly, in the letters, the message is summarized as "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:8-9; 2 Corinthians 4:5). In light of this, the opening line of the *Gospel* of Mark takes on new meaning, "The beginning of the good news about *Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*" (1:1). The most specific way of stating the truth non-Christians need to grasp is that Jesus is King.

Second, the way the apostles and early Christians made the point of Jesus' identity is by telling the story of his death and resurrection (#2 & #3). They sometimes introduced the "thesis" of his kingship first (Acts 2:22; 3:13; 10:36), but they almost always told about his death. Yet they didn't do this in exactly the same way Paul did in his letters to Christians or the way we talk about it today. Notably, these early spokespersons in Acts did not say Christ died for our sins. I know this may be shocking, and we may be tempted to say, "Yeah, but I bet they did say he died for our sins." Perhaps so, but this is not what the Bible actually says. If we stick with what the Spirit-inspired word of God in Acts actually records about how they proclaimed Christ's death in Acts, the key point seems to be that the people didn't recognize who Jesus really was and so they rejected and killed him (2:23; 3:13-15; 13:27). They did say that this was a part of God's plan and that it was according to the Scriptures (2:23; 3:17-18; 13:27-29). They also usually connected his death to and contrasted it with God raising him from the dead (2:23-24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; etc.). Their reasoning seems to be that the people didn't recognize Jesus as their King and so they rejected him (which made it look like he wasn't a King), but then God raised him from the dead showing that he was in fact God's Anointed One (or Christ, King, Messiah, Lord, Son of God)! God's plan for unfolding and revealing the gospel initially was done by Jesus being crucified and then raised from the dead, showing him to be Lord and Christ. The early spokespersons continued to communicate the message in the same way, by telling the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Through this profound events, they led people to see who Jesus is.

All this helps me with a question I've had. We are commissioned to tell good news, but it seems to me that most of the people around us in the United States have already heard this news. So I've wondered, How do you tell good news to people who have already heard it? I now realize that people have heard the good news about Jesus sort of like they have heard about Brexit or the French Revolution or Roosevelt's New Deal. They have heard of it and may be vaguely aware of some of the events, but they don't really grasp the significance of the events. So, too, they have heard of Jesus' death and resurrection, but don't understand that this shows him to be the ultimate authority in the universe. This gives us news to tell!

In addition to pointing out the identity of Jesus, the early spokespersons of the good message also underscored the extreme importance of who Jesus is in at least two other ways. They indicated the dramatic, all-encompassing response that the news demanded, and they told the wonderful blessings that come to those who did respond to it. These will be my third and fourth observations about the message.

So, third, both Jesus and the early spokespersons indicated that the necessary and appropriate response to the news they proclaimed was to give Jesus total loyalty and devotion. People must humble themselves, forfeit all claims to status and take on the non-status of a child. They must totally change their hearts and lives—that's repentance. They must embrace and confess Jesus as absolute Lord. They must die to their old lives, be buried with Jesus in baptism, and be raised to live a whole new life. Watering down, softening, or downplaying the response the gospel demands misleads people about the extreme importance of what God did in Christ. To do so is heresy.

Fourth, Jesus and the early spokespersons also described wonderful blessings for those who submit to the reign and lordship of Christ. This is why God's message is called good news. The blessings include having a fantastic Leader for our lives (Mark 1:14-15), that we are turned away from worthless and wicked things (Acts 3:26; 14:15), and that it is available to everyone (Luke 2:10-11; Acts 10:34-35). We are especially blessed by our King's willingness to be merciful and forgive us for ignoring and defying him before we knew him and even at times after entering his kingdom. Jesus and the early spokespersons often mentioned forgiveness and salvation, and they are clearly integral to the gospel (Acts 4:12; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 16:31; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

There is a tendency among some believers today, however, to place such a strong emphasis on salvation that the message gets out of balance to the point that it does damage. Sometimes people make salvation and forgiveness the most important part of the message, instead of Christ



himself being the most important part. If asked, they would readily say that salvation is from Christ and due to him, but in practice they celebrate the blessing of salvation so much that sometimes Christ is subtly moved off to the side. What they do is sort of like a mom announcing to her kids, "You're going to get some really cool toys when grandma gets here," instead "Grandma is coming!" Gifts will be received, for sure, but the emphasis is on the wonderful person, not the gifts.

This tendency is usually accompanied by a strong emphasis on grace. Please know that I thoroughly believe in salvation by grace (Acts 20:24; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:3-7). But when the gospel is "offered" by saying a person can have salvation and forgiveness at no cost whatsoever, we inevitably distort the total response the gospel demands (third observation above and #5 above that). In Churches of Christ, the cost is sometimes watered down to include merely getting baptized and coming to church regularly. In practice we appear to be okay with people otherwise remaining immature in Christ forever. In evangelical churches the cost is even less—just say this "sinner's prayer"—and not only will you be saved but you can never lose your salvation! I recently heard a TV commercial that invited us to get to know the one "who has done everything for you and asks for nothing from you." None of this sounds anything like the stark demand for repentance and total loyalty that both Jesus and apostles proclaimed.

Part of the reason for putting the primary emphasis on the free gift of salvation instead of on Christ himself is a misapplication of Paul's writings. The wonderful passages on grace in Romans 3, Galatians 2, Ephesians 2, and Titus 3 were not written for non-Christians. Rather, all of these passages are explanations and clarifications about the gospel, written to people who were already Christians but who were in danger of being led astray by legalism. To correct this, Paul strongly emphasizes that salvation is a gift from God due to his mercy. If you want to know what Paul believed and taught about the response non-Christians need to make to the gospel to be saved, you can find that in other places (Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). No, these do not earn salvation. But Scripture is clear that we must respond to Christ with total devotion in order to be in his kingdom and receive its blessings.

In addition to misapplying Paul's writings, I believe this watering down of the response to the gospel is sometimes motivated by a self-centered, sinful desire to make things as easy for ourselves as possible. Our human tendency is to want all we can get for the least possible cost. This is the great harm that comes when we overemphasize salvation and downplay the total response that God requires. If we give people a foundation of receiving all kinds of wonderful benefits and blessings at no cost whatsoever, we are

orienting them to look for the best possible deals they can find their entire Christian lives. When we offer the gospel as a “great deal” in this way, we are guilty of creating the very consumer Christians who later frustrate us so much down the road.

Practical Application (#1). These exercises are designed to help us be prepared to answer anyone who asks the reason for our hope and be able to speak it clearly and faithfully (1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

a. Consider again how Jesus’ message of the kingdom, also repeated in Acts, can and should be a part of our proclamation to non-Christians (see verses on p. 63 if you want).

b. Consult the way the message about Jesus was actually proclaimed to non-Christians in some of the messages in Acts (2:22-41; 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-48; 13:13-48; 17:15-34). (You may only be able to read some of these and get a general sense this week, but it would be worth doing a thorough, in-depth study of the exact points made in each message in Acts at some point. If you do this now or later, you can add some sheets of paper in your notebook here).

c. Are there passages in the Letters that correspond to what you are seeing about the message in the Gospels and Acts? Are there any new points in the letters that you think are vital?

d. Look back over a, b & c (and anything else you want to consult) and **list** the particular points that you believe are vital to make when announcing the news about Jesus to 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans in general.

- e. Now write out a one paragraph summary of how you would announce this news to someone you know over coffee. Don't feel like you have to explain all the details, because you would be able to go back and explain anything that wasn't clear to them. Write it out in language that you would be comfortable to use, as if you were really talking to someone you know.