

SHARING JESUS

30 words that summarise the story of Jesus

Why I keep returning to the gospel

I was gifted by being born into a strong, open, warm-hearted Christian family. This meant that I learned about Jesus, God and the Church from the inside. It was the air that I breathed, and I value this enormously.

I was seven when, at a camp run by my Uncle David and Aunt Maureen, I first remember “giving my life” to Jesus. It was the first time I can recall understanding a message about the cross in a way that made it personal to me.

Of course, since then, my faith has developed, deepened and matured. So has my understanding of the meaning of that strange and terrible death on a hillside outside Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago, and of the extraordinary claim that the man who died there was raised from the dead and is now Lord.

Ever since then, as I've tried to put my faith into practice, I've been seeking to understand more deeply the meaning and power of the good news of Jesus: his life, death, resurrection, ascension and promised return. I've read books, listened to sermons and podcasts, searched my way around the internet, and read and reread the Scriptures, trying to understand more fully what God has done through Jesus and what it means for us.

Along the way, numerous theologians and writers have helped me. Michael Gorman, Scot McKnight, Matthew Bates, John Harrigan, Dallas Willard, and N. T. Wright (to name only a few) have all contributed to my understanding of the gospel, the Messiah, allegiance, the cross, resurrection and the purposes of God.

More recently, my reading has continued to challenge me to understand the gospel within the larger story of Scripture: the story of Israel, the Messiah, the nations, the defeat of evil and death, and the restoration of creation. These are not additions to the gospel. They help us see the breadth of the story that the New Testament itself proclaims.

I have come to realise that the gospel is both more specific and more expansive than I once understood. It is more specific because it is fundamentally an announcement about a particular person, Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead and enthroned as Lord. And it is more

expansive because the story of Jesus cannot be separated from God's long purposes for Israel, humanity and the whole creation.

The gospel is not simply a way of explaining how individuals can be forgiven and go to heaven when they die. It is the announcement of what God has done through Jesus, what he will finally accomplish through him, and how we are invited to find our place within that story.

Finding a way to summarise the gospel

The idea of trying to summarise the gospel in a small number of words was inspired by another minister seeking to help the gospel come alive in his own congregation and context.

But as I've continued to reflect on the gospel and to read the Scriptures, I've wanted to express the story in a way that more explicitly reflects my developing understanding. I want to retain the clarity and memorability of a short summary while giving greater prominence to Israel's story, the future of God's kingdom, the renewal of humanity and the restoration of creation.

I also want to be clearer about what we mean when we speak about sin, the cross, salvation and eternal life. Sin is not merely the breaking of rules or the committing of immoral acts. It is rebellion against God, the rejection of our calling, and the destruction of relationships. The cross is not simply a transaction in which Jesus is punished instead of us. It is God's saving action in and through the Messiah, who enters our condition, gives himself in love, confronts the power of sin and evil, deals with the defilement sin brings, reconciles us to God, and defeats death through his resurrection.

And the destination of the story is not that our souls escape the earth and live forever in heaven. It is the resurrection of the dead and the restoration of God's creation under the rule of the risen Jesus.

With those things in mind, I've developed my own summary.

Jesus is Israel's saving king who comes to reveal God's love to all, renew God's image in all, radiate God's life through all, remake God's creation for all, and restore God's kingdom over all.

This is a compact summary, not an attempt to squeeze every aspect of the gospel into a precise formula. Its purpose is to give us a memorable way into the much bigger story that Scripture tells.

The summary has been deliberately arranged so that each line contributes to the larger picture. It begins with Jesus and his identity as Israel's Messiah and saving King. It then describes the purposes of his coming, moving from the revelation of God's love and the renewal of humanity to the life of God's Spirit, the restoration of creation and the fulfilment of God's kingdom.

There is a story here, and a destination. And there is an invitation: to receive what God has done through Jesus, to give our allegiance to him, and to learn to live in the light of the future God has promised.

READING VERTICALLY

One way to read the summary is to arrange it in columns and so read it 'vertically' with the first line establishing the identity of Jesus and the remaining lines describing God's purposes and scope of his action through him.

The person

JESUS IS ISRAEL'S
SAVING KING

God's Action

REVEAL GOD'S LOVE
RENEW GOD'S IMAGE
RADIATE GOD'S LIFE
REMAKE GOD'S CREATION
RESTORE GOD'S KINGDOM

Scope

TO ALL
IN ALL
THROUGH ALL
FOR ALL
OVER ALL

Reading vertically draws our attention to three important features:

1. A story about Jesus

The good news begins with Jesus. He is not simply an illustration of a spiritual principle, a teacher of timeless wisdom, or an example of how to live well. He is the central character in the story God has been telling throughout Scripture.

The announcement is about who Jesus is and what God has done through him. His life, death, resurrection and enthronement are

historical events with significance for the whole world. The gospel is not primarily advice about what we must do to improve ourselves. It is news about what God has done.

2. The purposes of God

The repeated verbs — reveal, renew, radiate, remake and restore — describe God's saving purposes. They tell us something about the character of the God revealed in Jesus and the future towards which he is leading his creation.

The story is not ultimately about us. It is about God: his faithfulness, his love, his justice, his life, his purposes for humanity, and his determination to put right what has gone wrong.

Yet God's purposes are directed towards us and for our good. We are not incidental to the story. We are creatures made in God's image, people whom he seeks to reconcile to himself and restore to our calling.

3. The universal scope of the story

The repeated word *all* is deliberate.

The God of Israel is not merely the God of one nation, and the Messiah of Israel is not a saviour for one ethnic group alone. Through Jesus, God's purposes extend to the nations and ultimately encompass the whole creation.

This does not mean that every individual is automatically reconciled to God, regardless of their response. Nor does it mean that Israel's particular place in the story is erased by a general message about humanity. It means that the promises God made through Israel have a horizon that reaches the nations and the world he made. The gospel is for all peoples. Its destination is God's rule over all things. And its invitation is extended to all.

READING HORIZONTALLY

Read as a sentence, the summary gives us a sequence of claims:

- Jesus is Israel's saving King.
- He comes to reveal God's love to all.
- He comes to renew God's image in all.
- He comes to radiate God's life through all.
- He comes to remake God's creation for all.
- He comes to restore God's kingdom over all.

These are not six *separate* messages. They are connected aspects of **one story**.

Again, the first line identifies the person at the centre. The next four describe dimensions of his saving work and its effects. The final line identifies the destination towards which the story is moving.

The order is important. We begin with Jesus, not with our felt needs. We move through God's purposes for humanity and creation, and we finish with God's kingdom — his rightful rule finally established over all things.

Let's look at each phrase in turn.

JESUS IS ISRAEL'S SAVING KING

The opening words establish the identity of the person at the centre of the gospel. Jesus is Israel's saving King.

This is a more specific claim than saying that Jesus is a spiritual teacher, a religious founder, or even a saviour in a general sense. It locates him within the particular story of God and Israel that runs throughout the Scriptures.

The Bible begins with God's creation of the world and his calling of humanity to bear his image, to cultivate the earth and to live in faithful relationship with him. But humanity rebels against its Creator. Violence, alienation and death spread through human life, and the world fails to become the place of peace and flourishing God intended.

God's response is not to abandon his creation. He calls Abraham and promises to make a great people through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. He forms Israel, rescues them from slavery, makes

a covenant with them and gives them a vocation: to belong to him, to reflect his character and to be a blessing to the nations.

Israel's story, however, is also a story of failure. The people repeatedly turn away from God, worship other gods, oppress the vulnerable and fail to embody the vocation entrusted to them. Their kings fail, their land is devastated, and many are taken into exile. Yet the prophets continue to speak of God's faithfulness and his promises: a restored people, a renewed covenant, a righteous king from David's line, the defeat of Israel's enemies, the outpouring of God's Spirit and the restoration of God's purposes for the world.

The New Testament announces that Jesus is the Messiah for whom Israel has been waiting. He is the son of David, the fulfilment of Israel's hope, the one through whom God acts to rescue his people and bring blessing to the nations.

This is why Mark begins his account with the announcement of the good news of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1), and why the earliest Christian preaching repeatedly declares that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36).

Jesus is Israel's King. He embodies Israel's calling, remains faithful where Israel has been unfaithful, and brings Israel's story to its decisive turning point. Through his death and resurrection, God acts to confront the powers that enslave humanity and to open the promised future.

This is not a story in which the Church simply takes Israel's place. God's faithfulness to Israel is integral to the gospel. Gentiles are welcomed into the blessing promised through Abraham and brought into the people who belong to Israel's Messiah, without Israel's own story being erased or rendered meaningless.

The claim that Jesus is God's saving King also leads us into the mystery of his identity. Christians confess that in Jesus, God has come among us. The one who reveals the Father is not merely a messenger speaking about God from a distance. As Hebrews 1 puts it, the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

In Jesus, we encounter God's character in human life. We see his compassion, holiness, justice, faithfulness and self-giving love. We see what human life under God's rule is intended to look like.

The incarnation is therefore not an incidental prelude to the cross. God does not simply send a solution from a distance. In Jesus, he comes among us. He enters our human condition, shares our vulnerability, lives faithfully within Israel's story, confronts evil, suffers violence and death, and is raised by God to new life.

The Christian announcement is that this Jesus is alive and enthroned. He is not merely a figure from the past whose teaching we admire. He is the living Lord to whom we owe our allegiance.

Jesus is Israel's saving King. He is Lord.

COME TO REVEAL GOD'S LOVE TO ALL

The first purpose of Jesus' coming is to reveal God's love.

We may think we already know what love means. We associate it with kindness, affection, acceptance and goodwill. These are important, but the love revealed in Jesus is deeper and more demanding than a general feeling of benevolence.

Jesus shows us God's love in the way he lives. He welcomes outsiders, touches the unclean, heals the sick, eats with sinners, confronts hypocrisy, feeds the hungry, forgives those who have wronged him and teaches his followers to love their enemies.

He reveals a God who does not abandon people when they fail. Like the father in Jesus' story of the prodigal son, God seeks the lost and longs for the return of those who have turned away from him.

This love is not indifference to wrongdoing. Jesus does not pretend that sin is harmless, that injustice does not matter, or that destructive behaviour should simply be accepted. His love tells the truth about what is wrong while continuing to seek the restoration of those who are caught up in it.

The cross is the fullest expression of this love. There, the Messiah gives himself for others. He remains faithful to God and to his calling even when the powers of his world condemn him, humiliate him and put him to death. He does not answer violence with violence or hatred with hatred. He absorbs the hostility directed towards him and remains faithful in love.

The cross reveals the depth of human rebellion and violence, but it also reveals God's determination not to abandon us to them.

Paul writes that God demonstrates his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God's love is not a reward for people who have proved themselves worthy. It comes to us in our weakness, failure and alienation.

But the cross is more than a demonstration of love. It is God's saving action. Through the faithful self-giving of Jesus, God confronts the powers of sin and death, deals with the damage and defilement of sin, and opens the way to reconciliation.

We must be careful not to reduce this to the idea that an angry Father punishes an innocent Son so that he can finally bring himself to love us. The New Testament presents the cross as the work of the one God: the Father sends the Son in love; the Son willingly gives himself in faithfulness; and God acts through this self-giving to reconcile the world to himself.

The Father does not begin to love us because Jesus has been punished. God's love is the reason the Son comes. The cross reveals that love and is the means by which God acts to rescue us.

This is a costly and active love. It does not merely sympathise with our condition. It enters it in order to bring us home.

And this love extends to all. Jesus' welcome of sinners, his ministry among the marginalised, and his encounters with Samaritans and Gentiles anticipate the gathering of people from every nation into the family of God.

The gospel tells us that nobody is beyond the reach of God's invitation. Our worth does not have to be established before we can be loved. We are invited to receive God's grace, to be reconciled to him, and to learn the costly, truthful and generous love that Jesus embodies.

COME TO RENEW GOD'S IMAGE IN ALL

The second purpose of Jesus' coming is to renew humanity in the image of God.

The Bible's story begins with a remarkable claim: human beings are created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–28). We are made to represent God within his creation, reflecting his character through our relationships, our work, our creativity, our care for the earth and our responsibility towards one another.

This is part of what it means to be human. We are not accidents, consumers, economic units or isolated individuals inventing our own significance. We are creatures with a calling.

But our rebellion against God distorts that calling. We turn away from the one who gives us life and attempt to make ourselves the centre of the world. We use others to secure our own interests, pursue status at the expense of relationships, exploit creation rather than care for it, and become entangled in patterns of fear, selfishness and violence.

Sin is not simply the breaking of a list of rules. It is a rupture in our relationship with our Creator, a refusal of his rightful rule, and a failure to live as the people he made us to be. It damages our relationships with God, with one another, with ourselves and with the world.

Of course, sin includes specific acts of wrongdoing. Lies, betrayal, exploitation, greed, cruelty, sexual wrongdoing and injustice matter precisely because they damage the good relationships and responsibilities for which we were created. But beneath these acts lies a deeper disorder: humanity's refusal to trust God and live faithfully within his purposes.

The result is not only guilt. It is alienation, shame, corruption, captivity and death. We become less than the people we were made to be, and our communities and institutions can embody these same distorted patterns.

The gospel announces that God has not abandoned his image-bearing creatures. Jesus is the true image of God (Colossians 1:15). In his humanity, he shows us what human life looks like when it is wholly faithful to the Creator. He loves God and neighbour, serves rather than dominates, tells the truth, welcomes the vulnerable, resists evil and remains faithful even through death.

In Jesus, we see both who God is and what humanity is meant to become.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus deals with the alienation and corruption of sin and opens the way to restored relationship with God. We are forgiven, cleansed, reconciled and brought into a new relationship with our Creator. We are no longer defined by our rebellion or trapped within our old patterns of life.

The New Testament uses several important words to describe these gifts. Forgiveness speaks of the release of our sins. Justification speaks of being set right before God. Reconciliation speaks of restored relationship. Redemption speaks of liberation from bondage. Sanctification speaks of being made holy, set apart for God and shaped for his purposes.

These are not competing descriptions of salvation. They illuminate different dimensions of God's saving work.

And this renewal is not merely an individual experience. God is forming a people who learn to live together under the rule of Jesus. In a community marked by forgiveness, truthfulness, generosity, mutual service and reconciliation, we begin to see the image of God being renewed in human relationships.

The word *all* points to the breadth of God's purpose: people from every nation and background are invited into this renewed humanity. It does not mean that every person is automatically transformed regardless of their response. It means that the invitation is not restricted to one people, class or culture.

God's purpose is to restore human beings to their calling: to bear his image faithfully, to love him and one another, and to participate in his purposes for the world.

COME TO RADIATE GOD'S LIFE THROUGH ALL

God's purpose is not simply to forgive us and leave us as we were. He calls us into a new life, empowered by his Spirit.

The resurrection of Jesus is central here. God has raised Jesus bodily from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord and defeating

death's claim over him. The risen Jesus is the beginning and guarantee of the future resurrection God has promised.

And the New Testament announces that those who belong to Jesus are given the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's gift, the seal of our belonging to him and the guarantee of our future inheritance. The Spirit draws us into the life of the risen Messiah and enables us to begin living in ways that anticipate the future God has promised.

This is not a matter of trying harder to become better people through sheer willpower. Nor is it an escape from our ordinary human lives. It is the work of God within us, enabling us to live with a new centre, a new allegiance and a new hope.

Paul speaks of being transformed into the image of Christ and of the Spirit producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These are not simply desirable personal qualities. They are signs of a renewed humanity learning to live under the lordship of Jesus.

The Spirit also creates a community. We are baptised into one body, brought together across divisions of ethnicity, status, gender and social standing, and given different gifts for the good of one another. We learn to bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, welcome the stranger, serve the poor and care for the vulnerable.

The church is therefore more than a gathering of people who share religious beliefs. It is a people who belong to the risen Messiah, who receive the Spirit, and who are called to embody and announce the life of the coming age.

This does not mean that the Church has become a perfect society, or that God's promised future has already arrived in its fullness. We remain people who need forgiveness, correction and restoration. We live in a world still marked by sin, injustice, suffering and death. The final renewal of humanity awaits the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead.

But the Spirit is God's guarantee of that future. The life we receive now points towards the life God will bring to completion.

This is why our everyday lives matter. Our work, relationships, creativity, family life, use of money, care for the earth and treatment of other people can all become expressions of allegiance to Jesus. We are

learning to live now according to the character of the world God has promised.

The Spirit does not remove us from the world. He equips us to live faithfully within it, bearing witness to Jesus and sharing in God's purposes.

To radiate God's life is to become a people through whom the character of Jesus can be seen: not because we are extraordinary, but because God has given us his Spirit and called us to belong to his Son.

COME TO REMAKE GOD'S CREATION FOR ALL

The gospel does not end with the forgiveness of individual sinners, nor with the formation of a renewed community. God's purposes embrace the whole creation.

This is one of the most important things we can recover from the biblical story. The world God made is good. Human beings are embodied creatures, placed within a physical world and given responsibility for it. Our bodies, relationships, work, creativity and material existence are not disposable preliminaries to a purely spiritual future.

Yet creation is damaged. Human rebellion has consequences for the land, for the creatures who share it with us, and for the structures and systems through which human beings organise their lives. The world is marked by violence, exploitation, decay and death. Paul describes creation as groaning, waiting for liberation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:19–23).

God's answer is not to discard creation and rescue a few souls from it. The story of Scripture points towards the restoration of what God has made.

Jesus' resurrection is the decisive beginning of that promise in the sense that it demonstrates what God will do for his people: death does not have the final word. The risen Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection to come. His bodily resurrection assures us that God's future is not the abandonment of embodied life, but its transformation and renewal.

When Jesus returns, the dead will be raised, evil will be judged, and God's purposes for creation will be brought to completion. The imagery

at the end of Revelation is not of humanity escaping the earth to dwell forever in a distant heaven. It is of the holy city coming down from God, of God dwelling with humanity, and of the curse being removed.

There will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. God's dwelling will be with his people. The nations will walk by his light, and the servants of God will serve him and reign with him.

This is the Christian hope: resurrection and the renewal of creation under the rule of the risen Jesus.

Heaven matters, but heaven is not the final destination of the biblical story. The ultimate hope is not disembodied existence somewhere else. It is life with God in the restored creation, where human beings are fully alive, God's purposes are fulfilled, and the world is finally put right.

This future also gives dignity and purpose to life now. Our work for justice, peace, reconciliation, beauty and the care of creation cannot bring about God's final restoration by our own efforts. We cannot build the final kingdom ourselves, and we should not confuse our projects with God's promised future.

But our actions matter. They can serve our neighbours, resist destructive forces, protect what is vulnerable, and bear witness to the world God has promised. When we make peace, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, forgive one another, create beauty and care for the earth, we act in hope. We live towards God's promised future without pretending that we can manufacture it.

The gospel therefore gives us a reason both to grieve over the world's suffering and to work for its good. We do not have to believe that human progress will eventually solve every problem. Nor do we have to despair that everything we value will ultimately be lost.

The future rests in God's hands. The one who raised Jesus from the dead will raise his people and restore his creation.

God's saving purposes are as wide as the world he made.

COME TO RESTORE GOD'S KINGDOM OVER ALL

The final line brings the story to its destination.

Throughout the Bible, God is revealed as the rightful ruler of his creation. Human beings were made to live under his good rule,

reflecting his character and exercising their responsibility in ways that enable creation to flourish. But humanity's rebellion has distorted this calling, and the world is filled with rival claims to authority, destructive powers and patterns of life that oppose God's purposes.

God's response is to act through Israel and, ultimately, through Israel's Messiah. Jesus announces the good news of God's kingdom, calls people to repent and believe, confronts the powers of evil, and demonstrates what life under God's rule looks like.

But the kingdom of God is not simply a religious feeling, a private experience, or a project that the Church can build by its own efforts. It is God's rule: his rightful authority over the world he has made.

Jesus is already enthroned as the risen Messiah. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus declare that the crucified one is Lord. His authority is real, even though the world does not yet acknowledge it universally and the powers of sin and death continue to cause suffering.

The full establishment of God's kingdom, however, remains the future hope of the gospel. Jesus will return. The living and the dead will face God's judgment. Evil will be defeated. The dead will be raised. God's people will be vindicated, and creation will be restored under the rule of the Messiah.

This is the destination towards which the story of Scripture moves.

It is also the hope expressed in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: "May your name be Hallowed, may your kingdom come and may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

We pray for God's kingdom to come because we long for the world to be put right. We long for justice without oppression, peace without violence, relationships without betrayal, life without death, and a creation freed from corruption. We long for God's good purposes to be fulfilled, not only in our own lives but throughout the world.

And this future hope changes how we live now.

If Jesus is the world's true Lord, then no other authority is ultimate. Wealth, status, political power, cultural influence, technological progress and personal success cannot finally save us. We can engage with these things, enjoy what is good in them, and use them for the benefit of others, but we must not give them the allegiance that belongs to Jesus.

To follow Jesus is to begin living under his authority: learning his way of love, truth, holiness, justice and service. It is to become part of a people who bear witness to his lordship and who invite others to discover the life he gives.

We do not establish God's kingdom by our own strength. We receive the good news of the King, give him our allegiance, and participate in the work he gives us to do as we await his return.

The Church's calling is to announce this good news, to make disciples of Jesus, to live as a community shaped by his Spirit, and to bear witness to the future God has promised. We are not the destination of the story. We belong to the King whose rule will one day be acknowledged throughout the world.

The gospel begins with Jesus, Israel's saving King, and ends with God's kingdom restored over all.

This is the story of Jesus: the story of God's faithfulness to Israel, God's saving action through the Messiah, and God's promised future for the nations and the whole creation.

THE GOSPEL DEMANDS A RESPONSE

So far, we have concentrated on what God has done and what he has promised to do. But the gospel is not merely information about Jesus. It is an announcement that calls for a response.

When Jesus proclaimed the good news of God's kingdom, he called people to repent and believe. When the apostles announced that God had raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord, they called their hearers to turn to God, receive forgiveness, be baptised and become part of the community that belongs to Jesus.

Repentance is more than feeling sorry for the things we have done wrong. It means turning around: abandoning our rebellion, changing our minds and direction, and returning to the God from whom we have turned away.

Belief is more than agreeing that certain religious statements are true. It involves trust: recognising that the story of Jesus is true, entrusting ourselves to him, and giving him our allegiance as Lord.

This is why allegiance is such an important word. The gospel announces that Jesus is King, and the appropriate response is to acknowledge his authority and learn to live as his people.

This does not mean that we earn salvation through the quality of our allegiance, or that God accepts us because we have demonstrated sufficient commitment. God's grace comes to us as a gift. We are invited to receive what God has done through Jesus, to be forgiven and reconciled, and to live by the Spirit he gives us.

Our allegiance is the response of trust to God's saving action. It is the beginning of a new life, not a payment for one.

And because the gospel calls us into a relationship with God, it also calls us into relationship with others. We are not simply a collection of individuals who happen to believe the same things. We are brought together into a family, a people, a body — a community that belongs to the Messiah.

The gospel creates a new "us".

THE GOSPEL CALLS US INTO A NEW COMMUNITY

The good news of Jesus is personal, but it is never merely individualistic.

God's purpose has always been to form a people for himself. He called Abraham and his family, rescued Israel from slavery, made a covenant with them, and promised that through them the nations would be blessed.

Through Jesus, Israel's Messiah, that blessing reaches the Gentiles, who are welcomed into God's saving purposes.

The Church does not replace the story of Israel with a new story about a different people. It is a community drawn from the nations and brought together through Israel's Messiah, bearing witness to God's faithfulness and his purposes for the world.

This means that Christian discipleship cannot be reduced to a private relationship with Jesus. We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. We are called to forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, welcome the stranger, care for the poor, seek justice, and serve one another in humility.

Our life together should make visible something of the character of the King we proclaim.

Of course, the Church often fails to embody this calling. Christians can be selfish, divided, defensive and unjust. Churches can become preoccupied with their own survival, reputation or power. We need repentance and renewal as much as anyone else.

But the failures of the Church do not make the vision irrelevant. They remind us of our need for the grace of God and the transforming work of the Spirit.

The Church is a people being formed by the gospel, learning to live together under the lordship of Jesus and to bear witness to the world he will restore.

This is why the gospel we proclaim matters so much. If we tell a story that is only about individuals escaping punishment and going to heaven, we may produce people whose faith is largely concerned with their own spiritual security.

But if we proclaim the full story of Jesus — Israel's Messiah, crucified and risen Lord, giver of the Spirit and restorer of creation — we invite people into a much larger vision of life. We invite them to become disciples who love God and neighbour, participate in God's purposes, and live in hope of the resurrection and the restoration of all things.

THIS IS THE NEWS!

It is worth returning to the distinction between news and advice.

Advice tells us what we need to do. News announces what has happened.

The gospel certainly calls us to respond, but its foundation is not our response. Its foundation is God's action in history.

God has been faithful to his promises to Israel. Jesus has come as Israel's Messiah. He lived faithfully, announced God's kingdom, confronted evil, welcomed sinners and revealed God's character. He was crucified under the powers of his world, but God raised him from the dead. He has been exalted as Lord, and the Spirit is given to those who belong to him.

The apostles announced these things as good news. They did not simply offer a new religious technique or a private route to spiritual fulfilment. They proclaimed that God had acted through Jesus and that this action changed the way the world must be understood.

The announcement also reaches into the future. Jesus will return, the dead will be raised, evil will be judged, and God's purposes for Israel, the nations and creation will be fulfilled.

That is why the gospel can speak to the whole of human life. It tells us who God is, who we are, what has gone wrong, what God has done about it, and where history is going.

It tells us that sin and death are real, but that they will not have the last word. It tells us that our lives matter, but that we do not have to make ourselves the centre of the universe. It tells us that our work for justice and peace matters, but that we are not responsible for bringing the whole world to its final perfection. It tells us that forgiveness is possible, relationships can be restored, and a new way of being human can be learned together.

Above all, it tells us that Jesus is Lord.

SHARING JESUS CONFIDENTLY

There is a desperate need for the Church to recover the fullness and power of the good news of Jesus the Messiah and to learn how to announce it afresh to a generation that may know very little of the biblical story.

My hope is that this summary will help us do that. Not because these words contain everything there is to say, but because they give us a way into the larger story.

They remind us that the gospel is about Jesus before it is about us; that Jesus must be understood within the story of Israel; that the cross is God's saving action against sin, evil and death; that salvation means reconciliation and renewed life, not simply a change of status; that the Spirit forms us into a new community; and that the destination of history is resurrection and the restoration of creation under God's rule.

I hope this vision will shape our worship, our discipleship, our mission and our life together as a church in the years to come. I hope it will help us speak about Jesus with greater clarity, confidence and generosity. And I hope it will encourage us to live as people whose lives are shaped by the story we proclaim.

The world does not need the Church to offer another small story about how to become happier, more successful or more religious. It needs to hear the good news that God has acted through Jesus the Messiah, that Jesus is Lord, and that God will bring his creation to the future he has promised.

We are invited to receive this news, to give our allegiance to Jesus, to become part of his people, and to live in the light of his coming kingdom.

There is always more to say. This summary is only a beginning — a map sketched on the back of an envelope to help someone find their way into a much larger landscape.

But it is a beginning worth making.

JESUS IS ISRAEL'S SAVING KING.

He comes to reveal God's love to all, renew God's image in all, radiate God's life through all, remake God's creation for all, and restore God's kingdom over all.

This is the good news we have received, the hope we proclaim, and the story we are invited to live.

Richard Wilson

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