



Further Reflections

Out of This World or into the Kingdom?

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When you try and talk with someone about your faith, with the hope that they may come to know God through Christ, you probably have a basic idea of what you want to say. We are taught this in church “personal evangelism” classes. We may start our spiritual conversations differently, based on all kinds of factors, but you probably learned a “way” to help people make a decision to follow Jesus.¹ If you are in the West, that “way” very likely includes some elements of: God loves you, turn from sin (repent), believe and obey (sometimes!). These days, all of that assumes the person believes there is some sort of supreme being, but that is a different topic.

Certainly, these “standard” elements are a part of the process of believing/trusting/turning to God. But I wonder if we have focused too much on the “personal” aspect in this approach. The idea that their specific salvation is central, can give the wrong impression and blunt the spread of the Gospel. It only gives part of the picture. It is a very self-centered approach as it appeals to those who are interested in *their* eternal future – their ticket to heaven. Certainly, many “Sunday-only” Christians got their ticket, and said “thank you very much, now that I can’t lose my salvation, I’m good!” (OK, that is an overstatement, but only slightly!)

But many people today are *also* thinking more deeply of their family and friends—especially since COVID began. They consider the small clusters of those closest to them for many of life’s decisions. While we might question how young people today

make quality friends—because of the rise of social media and personal entertainment in your pocket or purse—they still think of those with whom they are “connected” as a crucial part of their lives. They really care about what they think, even when they disagree. They make (sometimes major) decisions in consultation with these friends. They care about their future too and often do not want to merely think of their own good, but the good of these close friends.

This isn’t new, but as I’ve thought about it more, I’ve wondered if we should change our approach when we talk about Jesus with non-believers. Here are a few ideas that may help.

- The word “gospel” or “evangelical” is transliterated from the original Greek root word “evangel.” In the New Testament times, the core idea behind the word, was “to bring or announce good news.” There are specific examples of it being used in relationship to announcements related to the Roman emperor.
- Jesus uses the phrase “Gospel of the kingdom.” A kingdom of which He is the King is an amazing thing to announce. He demonstrated His right to rule with powerful teaching and miracles all grounded in an amazing love.
- We may focus on the context of the message or what Jesus has done for us and miss actually *introducing* who He is to them. We often ask people to trust, believe, invite—all actions *they* take or that relate to *their* life situation or sin. That’s fine, but how much do they know about Him? Have they seen Him in our lives?

People often “introduced” people to Jesus Himself.

- In John’s Gospel, John (the baptizer), looked at Jesus as He walked by and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’ (John 1:36).

¹ We used to say “become a Christian” but that really doesn’t communicate what we want to say. The religious category of Christian (or Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist or...) is not what people are becoming when they trust in Christ. They may become part of one local body of the Christian Tradition, but that is so broad as to be only marginally helpful today. We all know churches that do not seem to reflect the teaching of the New Testament and the people who attend them are still called “Christians.”

- One of the two who heard John was Andrew, who first found his brother Simon and said to him, We have found the Messiah.... While Messiah is a profound concept to Jews of any time, Andrew is building on both his relationship with his brother and his discovery of Jesus. I wonder what else Andrew might have said to Peter?
- In John 4, the woman that Jesus meets at the well outside Sychar in Samaria witnesses to the people in town by saying, *Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?*

You might say, “I wish Jesus told my friends all they ever did...then they would believe.” But I believe He actually does—through us. They see Him in our lives. He also does that through the conviction of sin and the Spirit of course.

If we are known by our love, people are drawn to Jesus and their lives and need for Him are exposed by the truth that penetrates the darkness. I encourage you to study through more passages where people are introduced to Jesus, and rethink the way you share about the One who is truth. ❏



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