

**THE SCOPE OF OUR SAVIOUR'S GOSPEL OF SALVATION**

***The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh has been given to me, for Yahweh has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken; to proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to those in prison; to proclaim a year of favour from Yahweh, a day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all those who mourn and to give them for ashes a garland; for mourning robe, the oil of gladness; for despondency, joy. They are to be called 'terebinths of integrity', planted by Yahweh to glorify him. They will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise what has long lain waste, they will restore the ruined cities, all that has lain waste for ages past. (Isaiah 61:1-4. Cited by Jesus in Luke 4:16-30)***

**What is the scope of the Gospel? In essence, what are we to preach? What are we to witness to with our lives and conduct? What are people to be converted to? Is the answer to all these questions mainly about a personal relationship with Jesus that inwardly saves us individually from sin for a better life in the next world, or is it mainly about liberating this world and its inhabitants, especially those most unfortunate, from suffering and oppression and bringing about social justice in which, it is claimed, is found the Kingdom of God? There has often been real tension and even profound division between Christians who fall broadly into these two camps. Should this be so? Is one group right and the other wrong or does what they say complement? If so, does it all really require uniting into a fuller and truer and more original Gospel? We will briefly examine this.**

***The Gospel according to Jesus***

**What did Jesus really preach and live? The Gospel writers often indicate the core content of his message at the beginning of their accounts of his life. Thus Mark declares that 'Jesus proclaimed the Gospel from God saying "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel."' (Mk 1:14-15).' Matthew is similar (Mt 4:17). Luke fills out the content of this Gospel by giving us Jesus' inaugural sermon in his native town of Nazareth. It is a kind of manifesto. He reads out the first 2 verses from Isaiah 61 with which I began this reflection. Putting down the scroll, he then said the words were being fulfilled in their midst – that is, by him (Luke 4:16-30). In Jesus' day, people knew the Scriptures sufficiently well that a preacher could cite 1 or 2 verses and by this mean to bring to mind in hearers the wider passage in which the quote is situated. Thus we should not limit Jesus' intentions for his gospel exclusively to verses 1-2, or even to verses 1-4. So what does this tell us about the scope of the Gospel? What sort of salvation does it offer and to whom?**

**It is addressed to the socially marginalised, disadvantaged and excluded. It promises joy – always welcome - but will also produce integrity – something that can be a lot more costly. It is not just about individual blessing but is about social restoration- rebuilding cities and that which has long lain waste. (Though not explicit in this passage, other passages indicate that this encompasses the renewal of all of creation, not just man-made cultures and civilisation.) It requires the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to proclaim this and for it to become reality. All this points to a gospel full of practical implications and social applications.**

**The Gospels show Jesus following through this original manifesto by his work with outcasts, sick and poor, by his identification with them, by his ongoing preaching drawing attention to issues of justice as well other matters. Clearly living such a gospel will be costly for us – but this should not surprise us. It was for Jesus. He lived a poor and precarious life, especially in his public ministry, and he ended up being seen as a very real danger to the self-interests of both the religious and secular institutions of his day and the power and status they wielded. As such he became a prisoner, was condemned by an unjust trial, and executed as a criminal among criminals. This should not put us off. It shows that the Gospel is not just to be proclaimed but also lived out and, as far as possible, made a reality in all its aspects since the Gospel is about transformation.**

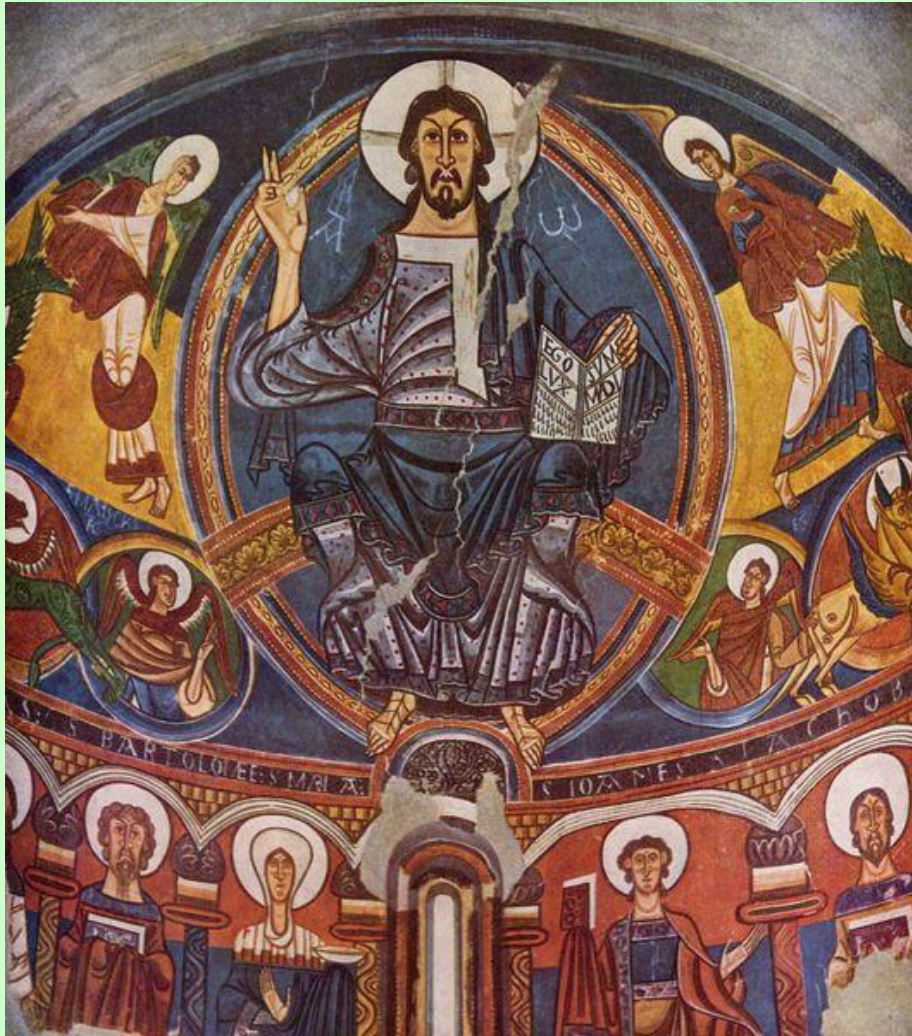
***Receiving salvation and being its instruments to others***

**We are called to follow Jesus entirely and to be converted to all of his message, with both its personal and social dimensions. We cannot do this adequately or in a sustained way, with enduring hope and compassion that will not run dry, without his grace. We need a new heart since our old heart is part of the problem. We need the Spirit of God. Also we need Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Living this way normally comes from deep personal faith in Jesus and the sustenance that comes from his friendship. However, it is not enough to limit our living and proclaiming of the Gospel to inner relationship with Jesus and to personal and perhaps family morality – though it does include these features. We are called to proclaim the full Gospel and to live the full gospel, not a truncated version. In doing this, we more effectively receive the blessings of salvation and more effectively offer all the blessings of salvation to others.**

***Understanding, living and communicating the full Gospel content***

**The scope of the salvation we preach, receive and serve must be expressed in the kerygma, the Gospel message, that we proclaim. This is that Jesus came from God, announcing God's Kingdom and preaching its scope and qualities. He lived all this out in deed and in the power of the Spirit, and by the integrity and quality of his whole character. He died to reconcile us to God, thus breaking the power of sin and death. By his resurrection he established a new people who are the first fruit of a new creation. The Holy Spirit is poured out to bring all this about. He will come again to bring it into being in its fullness. In the meantime we are to look to that end with joy and hope and to witness to it all, making it a reality, as far as that is possible, in the broken conditions of what remain of the present age, thus calling as many as possible to share in its blessings.**

**Continues below**



**It is vital to really appreciate and live out what this means. God became human, to save the whole of the created order, not to help us escape from it or wash our hands of it. It is also vital to realise that Jesus reveals and introduces us to God who is Trinity, that is 'community', and he saves us into community and as stewards of the whole of creation, which was our original vocation in Adam. All things are restored in Christ (Col 1:18-20). Seeing the Gospel as only about private individual salvation is not the Gospel. Trying to live out the Gospel's full social call without personal faith in Jesus and without looking to the fulfilment that only Jesus can bring at his return in glory is also not the Gospel. Let us then preach and live the full Gospel. In this are peace and salvation - and sanity too.**

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