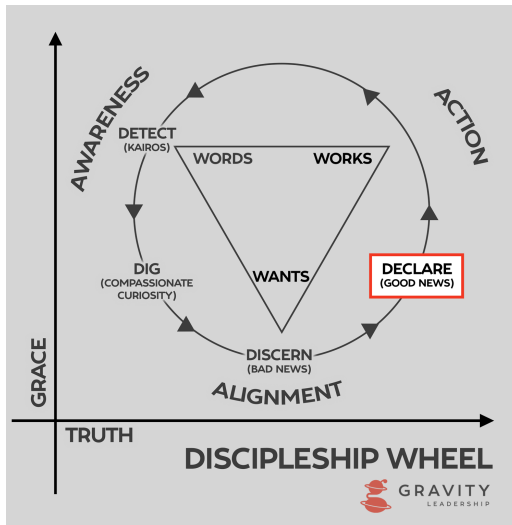


# The Practices - and Believe the Good News.

*“The word of God is never something finished, to be surveyed like a particular landscape, but it is something new every moment, like water from a spring or rays of light.”*

– Hans Urs von Balthasar

## How To Proclaim Good News



Reviewing last time: The bad news in our lives is the lie that we need to perform or strive to get belonging, security, and significance and the idolatry that results as we seek those things apart from God.

The good news is that, through our new covenant identity, God has freely given us belonging, security, and significance in and through Jesus.

So how do we learn to actually proclaim this good news to ourselves and one another? There are quite a few potential pitfalls here:

- How do we learn to proclaim good news so it doesn't devolve into trite sentiment or "positive thinking"?
- How do we learn to proclaim good news contextually and specifically so it doesn't become general, abstract truths that we blithely throw around? ("God is good.")
- How do we learn to proclaim good news freely and joyfully so it doesn't become a passive-aggressive guilt trip? ("God's not worried... why are you?")

## Learning to preach the good news from Jesus

As usual, we want to take a look at how Jesus proclaimed good news to his disciples. This will begin to give us an imagination for good news that transcends the pitfalls discussed above. The good news Jesus preached consistently focused on two related announcements:

1. *Who God really is, and*
2. *Who we are (and how reality is) because of who God is.*

Let's take a look at how this fleshes itself out by looking at John 21:1-17. This is the text where, after the resurrection, the disciples have a miraculous catch of fish, and Jesus reinstates Peter. As you read, ask this question: how does Jesus proclaim good news to Peter in this text?

## **Good news for Peter's lack of security**

The first point of bad news into which Jesus proclaims the good news is Peter's lack of security. He does this through fishing advice.

After the resurrection of Jesus, some of the disciples have gone back to fishing. There is a sense of "giving up on the dream" here: going back to what they know because they've given up everything to follow Jesus, and now they've got nothing to show for it.

So they go back to fishing, but they've been at it all night and still have nothing to show for it. Interestingly, Jesus first asks the disciples to get real about their lack. "Friends, have you caught any fish?" he asks. "No," they answer.

"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some more," Jesus says. They trust Jesus' invitation (even though they don't recognize him yet), and they're unable to haul in the net because they catch so many fish. John realizes that it's Jesus, and Peter jumps into the water to get to shore quicker.

**The fishing advice is Jesus' contextualized proclamation of good news to his disciples:** he invites the disciples to throw their nets on the other side of the boat, and then provides for their lack.

Jesus offers good news in a place where they were experiencing a lack of security. All night fishing, nothing to show for it. They aren't fishing for leisure or sport, they're fishing because their livelihood is at stake. One of the temptations Peter (and the other disciples) faced was to fear not having enough, and Jesus met him in that fear and provided abundantly (**the good news of security**).

But Peter had to trust Jesus' fishing advice—he had to receive the grace, he had to surrender to the invitation. Peter displays his trust in Jesus by simply taking his advice and throwing his net on the other side of the boat.

Ultimately this simple interaction is all about the gospel: **who God is** (the Lord of all creation who provides for his children), and **who Peter is because of who God is** (blessed, provided for, living in abundance, secure, safe, taken care of).

"You can trust me to provide for you, Peter. Apart from me you can do nothing; but in me you have everything you need."

## **Good news for Peter's lack of belonging**

The second point of bad news into which Jesus proclaims good news is Peter's lack of belonging—his loneliness, his shame—and he does this by eating breakfast with him.

The last time Peter looked into Jesus' eyes, he had just denied him three times (Luke 22:54-62). Peter's disloyalty to Jesus had severed his relationship with him; he had failed to follow the only "law" of the new covenant (love) when he confessed with his mouth that he didn't know Jesus.

Peter was isolated from covenant with Jesus because of his shame. He was insecure about whether he really belonged with Jesus anymore. Into this insecurity about belonging, Jesus dignifies Peter by asking him, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught," and then he welcomes Peter to the table, "Come and have breakfast."

In this simple act of cooking breakfast and eating it with Peter, Jesus communicates, "I give you all my worth, honor, and value. You are in my family. You still belong with me at my table."

Notice the words are only part of this contextualized gospel proclamation. "Come and have breakfast" is followed up with actually having breakfast together. This is the gospel embodied through an act of honor and agape love.

Table fellowship is good news to someone who has disavowed knowing Jesus. It means Jesus accepts, receives, welcomes, identifies with, and loves you.

Jesus identifies with and includes Peter and his friends in his company, and in so doing declares his shame to be untrue and undone. You do belong.

The "breakfast event" is good news, but Peter had to participate in it. He had to surrender to being served by Jesus (again!) and submit his body to the reality of that identity ("I am one who Jesus loves, serves, takes as an intimate companion") by sitting down and putting fish into his mouth.

The breakfast event declares, "you are acceptable to me, Peter. I will remain loyal and united with you despite your failings. My love makes you enough for me. Receive my acceptance and validation. You belong!"

## **Good news for Peter's lack of significance**

The third point of bad news into which Jesus proclaims good news is Peter's lack of significance, and it is through a commission to shepherd others with the authority of Jesus (the Good Shepherd) that he does this.

After breakfast, Jesus has a brief, meaningful conversation with Peter where he asks him three times, “Do you love me?” and then commissions him three times, saying “Feed my lambs” or “Take care of my sheep.”

Most of us have been taught to see this passage as Jesus “restoring” or “forgiving” Peter, which is true, but these questions and commissions are also another way Jesus proclaims good news to Peter.

Jesus is dealing with Peter's guilt here, and the resulting lack of significance that he is wrestling with. Peter had been overly confident in his ability to stand with Jesus and do the work of the kingdom (“Even if all fall away, I will not!”). Now that he has realized his weakness, he fears that it means he no longer has a place in God's plans.

Jesus proclaims the good news of significance to Peter here, first by inviting him to confess his faithful love (by asking “Do you love me?”), and then by authorizing Peter as his representative (by commanding, “Feed my sheep”).

Peter isn't told to buck up, make it happen, work harder, or strain more. Peter isn't offered an exhaustive explanation of how Jesus' death secured his forgiveness, nor is he given a sure-fire formula of salvation. He is simply given a command to do the simple work of the kingdom, which gives back to Peter his sense of significance.

“I am the one who forgives, Peter, even your deepest transgressions. There is still a place for you as my authorized representative. What you do matters. Will you trust my love enough to participate?”

## **Observations about how Jesus proclaims good news**

All three instances of good news in this story (fishing advice, breakfast, and question/commission) were particular to Peter and how he needed to respond to Jesus' lordship at that moment. Jesus doesn't offer abstract theological formulas or elegant theories to agree with. Instead, Jesus comes in the particularities and circumstances of Peter's life and offers him:

- *abundant provision in his lack of security,*
- *affectionate partnership in his lack of belonging, and*
- *authoritative participation in his lack of significance.*

## **Another example: Zaccheus**

There are all kinds of other examples of Jesus proclaiming *concrete good news* in context throughout the Gospels. In Luke 19:1-10, Jesus proclaimed good news to Zaccheus, but he didn't explain an atonement theory or ask if he wanted forgiveness for his sins. Instead,

**Jesus invited himself to lunch at Zaccheus' house**, which, in Jewish culture, is the same thing as saying: "I'm willing to leverage all my honor on your behalf, willing to give you belonging in my family and significance and worth beyond what your life deserves. Will you accept this new identity and relationship to God through me?"

The good news to Zaccheus wasn't "you get to go to heaven when you die," but rather, **"come out of that tree. I'm having lunch at your house."** The good news Jesus extends to people is **specific and particular**. Zaccheus needed to respond to the lordship of Jesus in that moment in a concrete fashion.

Another example: Pentecost

We see another example in Acts 2:1-41, where Peter and the other believers had just received the promised Holy Spirit and began to draw attention and scrutiny from the Jewish leaders. Peter took the opportunity to do a few things we have seen already as a part of gospel proclamation.

- *He began with naming reality (i.e. Christians speaking in tongues; others thinking they were drunk).*
- *He retold the story to show this was actually the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work (not the spirits of fermentation).*
- *He proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Jesus is Lord!).*
- *Finally, he called people to identify with Jesus and follow him (be baptized in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of sins).*

## **So how do we proclaim good news?**

Proclaiming good news "in real life" will be a lot like what Jesus did for Peter in John 21:1-17. This is what "gospeling" will sound like most of the time. It's not that we don't need atonement theories; rather, we've been asking them to do the wrong work.

Jesus and his disciples don't seem to think our deepest problem is our lack of sufficient insight into the mechanics of how God forgives our sin in Christ. Rather, in text after text, story after story, we see the good news of **security, belonging, and significance** being proclaimed in particular ways, in particular contexts.

If we want to know what was so good about the gospel Jesus preached, we need to pay attention first to the problems Jesus spoke to and acted against—the lack of security, belonging, and significance that people experience—and second to the promise that these things are restored to us in Christ.

So what does it mean to proclaim good news like Jesus?

1. We offer concrete, specific proclamation (or enacting) of “Who God is” and “Who we are because of who God is” that speaks directly to the “bad news” that’s showing up in someone’s life.
2. We invite an immediate, embodied response of trust (throwing a net to the other side of the boat, eating the breakfast, feeding the sheep).

Why is this? Because, as the quote from Balthasar at the beginning of this lesson shows, the good news isn’t static “information” that I recall, it is dynamic proclamation that must be spoken anew each day!

**Exercise: Identifying Good News** - Hopefully from your homework you’ve identified bad news and can probably tell what the good news might be.

- *First identify, if the bad news was about significance, security, or belonging.*
- *Now ask each other what the opposite of your bad might sound like (this is close to the good news)? Write that down.*
- *Ask this question to each other: “If Jesus was sitting right next to you, what would do you need him to say to you right now?”*

**Homework for next time is 2 things: 1) Call up the same people as last week and process through an entire Kairos together. 2) Write down how you utilize this at Home Group.**