

"Apply thy whole self to the text [of the Bible]; apply the whole text to thyself."

—John Albrecht Bengel

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## Why Preach the Gospel to the World?

On a street corner of a crowded city, a young man in threadbare clothes stands on a pine box, a worn Bible clutched in one hand. He shouts at the hustling passersby, "[God](#) is not mocked! We will reap what we have sown! The end is coming soon—the signs are all around us! Now is the [time to repent](#) of your wicked ways and return to the God of the Bible! Otherwise, you will end up in hellfire!"

In a field on the outskirts of a county seat, a large canvas tent sits amid the remnants of the fall harvest and a scattering of vehicles. A large sign reading "Revival! Tonight at 7 PM" stands near the road, and a few cars are pulling into the field. Inside, a tall man stands behind a lectern on a stage, his long arms nearly scraping the canvas roof as he enthusiastically leads the crowd in singing "What a Friend We Have in [Jesus](#)," his wife accompanying them on an upright piano that has seen better days.

A handsome man in a finely tailored suit, coiffed hair, and makeup stares into a camera, his face kind and concerned, his voice urgent and imploring: "Won't you give your heart to Jesus? He loves you and wants to forgive your sins and wrap you in His loving arms for all eternity! You can be assured of

the bliss of heaven, and all you need to do is to say the sinner's prayer with me. Will you do that? Will you commit your life to Him? Will you come to the Lord?"

Each of these scenarios is a caricature of the ways nominal Christians have gone about preaching [the gospel](#). From lone preachers to great crusades, the drive to preach God's Word to the whole world and bring as many into the church as possible has been a hallmark of American Christianity. Around the globe, many have copied these models to reach the masses of far-flung nations that do not have a tradition of Christianity, and now the number of Christians on Planet Earth approaches 2.5 billion people.

In Mark's version of the Great Commission, Jesus says unambiguously, "Go into all [the world](#) and preach the gospel to every creature" ([Mark 16:15](#)). He tells the apostles in [Luke 24:47](#) "that [repentance](#) and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Matthew's account of it does not mention preaching the gospel ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)), but in the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus prophesies, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

God wants the good news that His Son brought to humanity preached to everyone. It is a primary work of the church that Jesus founded and heads to this day. He tasked His apostles with spreading it worldwide, which His directive to Paul through Ananias encapsulates: "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel" ([Acts 9:15](#)). He and the other apostles felt compelled to undertake this service for their Master with a drive beyond the ordinary: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" ([I Corinthians 9:16](#)).

The church of God and the Christian churches of this world agree wholeheartedly on this point: Jesus commands His church to preach the gospel. At this point, however, the two groups diverge, specifically on the fundamental question, "Why is the church to preach the gospel?" Our answer reveals how well we believe and understand God and His purpose for mankind.

Jesus teaches that we are to live by every word of God ([Matthew 4:4](#); [Luke 4:4](#)). Among the last warnings in the Bible is one that concerns adding to or taking from what God has revealed ([Revelation 22:18-19](#)). In his final message to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul provides an example of teaching and preaching "the whole counsel of God" ([Acts 20:27](#)). God gives us the principle of "precept must be on precept, precept on precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" in [Isaiah 28:10](#), meaning that we must gather the Bible's complete revelation on a subject to understand a truth fully.

In terms of preaching the gospel, nominal Christianity's mistake stems from ignoring or de-emphasizing fundamental principles that clarify Jesus' commands. Preaching the gospel is good, but preaching it for the right reasons puts one in harmony with God. The church should always seek "to walk just as He walked" ([I John 2:6](#)) and to "follow in His steps" ([I Peter 2:21](#)).

What fundamental principle has this world's Christianity failed to consider? Perhaps the most obvious one is Jesus' statement in [John 6:44](#): "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (repeated for emphasis in verse 65: "No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father"). Paul, quoting Psalm 14, writes, "There is *none* who understands; there is *none* who seeks after God" ([Romans 3:11](#); emphasis ours throughout). People cannot [seek God](#) because they cannot know Him. Instead, He seeks His chosen ones and gives them what they need to believe. Thus, while He sends out His message broadly, salvation is not now open to everyone. The Father chooses individuals to come to Christ and believe and be saved.

[Luke 12:32](#) bolsters the idea that God is not saving everyone now: "Do not fear, *little flock*, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Throughout His ministry, Jesus reinforces the truth that God's elect—those who are presently being saved—is a limited group. For instance, He says in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are *few* who find it" ([Matthew 7:14](#)). The Parable of the Sower and the Seed illustrates that God's calling falls on "good ground" only a small percentage of the time ([Matthew 13:3-9](#), 18-23).

So, the idea that the church preaches the gospel to save the world is misguided. God never says such a thing in His Word. The clearest statement of the reason for preaching the gospel appears in [Mark 1:14-15](#): "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the [Kingdom of God](#), and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.'" Like His words in [Luke 24:47](#), the gospel is a warning message of repentance, a call to turn from [sin](#), because God's Kingdom will soon be established, when God "will render to each one according to his deeds" ([Romans 2:6](#)).

In this vein, Jesus says that the "gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world *as a witness*" ([Matthew 24:14](#)). A witness provides evidence or testimony. The preaching of the gospel testifies about who God is, what His standards are, what He is doing, and what is coming to fulfill His purpose. He does this because He wants humanity to have no excuse when He brings destruction on this world for its manifold sins and establishes His Kingdom in its aftermath. And from among those who hear this warning message, He chooses a few to respond in belief and enter the church where He can "[teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you" ([Matthew 28:20](#)).

The why of preaching the gospel is all-important. It is not a message of salvation for all people—at least not for now. God's plan provides for the salvation of most of mankind in the general, or second, resurrection because He is "not willing that any should perish [eternally] but that all should come to repentance" ([II Peter 3:9](#)). In this age, however, He is training His little flock and warning the world through the preaching of the gospel that He is about to act in righteousness to bring justice and [peace](#) to the earth.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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**The True Gospel**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

There are many 'gospels' in the world but only one true gospel—the message that Christ brought about the good news of His coming Kingdom! It is the ONLY gospel that will bring us salvation. We need to hear it!

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