

# back to basics : evangelism

Ben Goddard-Fletcher brings evangelism hints from Jeremiah to the wards

**I** find evangelism hard.' Thus opens Rico Tice's book *Honest Evangelism*. Rico has been at All Souls Langham Place, a large Church in central London, for more than 25 years. He is now Senior Minister for Evangelism. If you ever hear him speak, you'll soon realise that he's an excellent evangelist.

And yet, this is how he opens his book. I think many of us (if not all of us) find evangelism hard; I know I do. And in a sense, it's encouraging to hear Rico open with these words because I know that if even he, a seasoned evangelist, finds evangelism difficult, then my experience isn't abnormal; in fact, it's normal.

## why might evangelism be hard?

Maybe we don't think we know what to say, and worry we'll get it wrong, so either people won't actually hear the gospel, or they won't want to believe because I've made the gospel sound stupid. We might think that people will respond negatively (either thinking that I'm stupid for believing it, that

the Christian worldview is harmful and evil) or just won't care. Might they stop being my friend, or even report me for what I've said? Or maybe we ourselves are just not that confident in what we believe to think its worth sharing.

## how did Jeremiah do it?

Jeremiah was a prophet who was to speak God's word of judgement to a people that didn't want to hear it (sound familiar?). I have found some truths from Jeremiah chapter 1 helpful when I've been in situations where I've felt compelled to speak God's word but haven't wanted to do so.

## *Jeremiah can find evangelism hard in the same ways we can*

He doesn't feel like he's any good at telling people the gospel: *'I do not know how to speak, I am too young'* (verse 6). He know the people who listen to him will fight against him (verse 19) and so God has to tell him, *'Do not be afraid of them'* (verse 8).

## *God really is in control of his word*

The almond tree in verse 11 at first seems a bit random; what has an almond tree got to do with



anything? The Hebrew the word for 'almond' sounds like the word for 'watching' – so perhaps God is making a pun here - but why? Puns can show us that the person delivering the pun can see how all the words fit together and has mastery over them; and this underscores the point in verse 12 – he really is watching over his word. God is faithful to his word and will make it come to pass.

What Jeremiah says ends up coming true. So also of course with God's promises about Jesus' first coming. And so, we ought to trust him with his word as a whole for us today. Whether we're able to speak it well or not, whether people want to hear it or not, in a sense, it doesn't matter; God is watching over his word to perform it.

### *both judgment and hope*

But what is this word Jeremiah had to speak? Verses 9-10 and 13-16 speak of judgment, particularly coming for Jerusalem because of their sin in forsaking God. Yet one line in verse 10 gives a glimmer of hope: 'to build and to plant'.

The word we are to bring is not just of God's coming judgment on sin, for which we need to repent, but also his wonderful salvation offered to us in Christ, which we need to trust. In a sense, it's easier for us than for Jeremiah, because we have a better message not just of judgment, but also of salvation! God is bringing judgment and salvation, so repent and trust him.

who was to speak God's word of judgment to a people that didn't want to hear it (sound familiar?)

### *the fate of the messenger*

What will happen to the one who brings God's word? Both verses 4-8 and 17-19 show Jeremiah being commissioned to go and speak whatever God tells him. But as he goes he will ultimately be saved because God is with him. God doesn't lie to Jeremiah; he lets Jeremiah know what is going to come.



Yet God gives Jeremiah comforting words; God's messenger will be opposed, but God will be with him to deliver him, so don't be afraid.

### *the ultimate message*

These three things can be really helpful to remember: God is in control of his word – so you better believe it. God is bringing judgement and salvation – so repent and trust him. God's messenger will be opposed, but God will be with him to deliver him – so don't be afraid.

## God's messenger will be opposed, but God will be with him to deliver him, so don't be afraid

This all points to Jesus, who brought God's word of judgment and salvation, who was opposed on earth, but whom God raised from the dead. We must be hearers of Jesus' words ourselves, who repent and believe, and no longer oppose him but come to him for salvation. But also, we join his mission and are sent out into the world carrying his message of judgment and salvation; people will fight against us but ultimately, whether now or on the last day, God will save us, and he will be with us until that day when we see our Lord face-to-face!

### practical tips

Now there is another reason we find evangelism difficult, namely, we have no clue where to start! So as the old med school adage goes, 'see one, do one, teach one' goes, here are a few tips that I have found helpful to get me started:

- **pray.** Ask God to give you opportunities to speak about him, but also pray that God will give you the courage to speak when these opportunities come. I find that if I've prayed about it beforehand, then I'm often more likely to speak when the opportunity comes.
- **drop things in.** If you're a Christian, then I'm sure you do things in your life that flow out of this, like going to Church, or spending time praying or reading the Bible. So, if someone asks you what you did at the weekend, you can tell them you went to Church. You could even ask them what they did at the weekend and then, if they ask you what you did at the weekend, you can tell them you went to Church. Nothing may come of it, but something might; and people will at least know that you're probably a Christian.
- **ask questions and listen.** Be (genuinely) interested in people and hear what they have to say; it will show them you care about them and help you to see exactly where they're coming from, so you can tailor what you say in response (just like taking a good history is needed for having a good management plan). So, if you've mentioned you go to Church, you could ask them if they've ever been to a Church, why or why not, and whether they'd like to join you.
- **be real.** If someone asks you a question about what you believe or why, tell them the truth. If you don't know the answer, tell them you don't know but you'll go away and think about it or ask someone at Church who might know (and then actually do that).
- **be prepared.** If you're a Christian, then you believe some basic facts about the story of the Bible: since you believe this, if you want others to believe it too, it might be a good idea to prepare a few sentences that explain this story so that you're ready to tell someone whenever they ask. A previous *Nucleus* article looks at one way to do this.<sup>1</sup>
- **have people around you.** As much as you can, meet with other Christians in your workplace; you never know what opportunities this might present between the two of you.



- **Saline Solution.** Saline Solution is a course CMF runs periodically that is immensely helpful in training healthcare professionals to speak for Jesus in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> I highly recommend it.

## the healthcare context

We have unique challenges and opportunities as healthcare students. Start thinking how you can be prepared to respond to the challenges you may face and utilise the opportunities you may have.

In healthcare we meet lots of people – both patients and colleagues – and we often meet them in times of distress. Sometimes it may be appropriate to ask them about their spiritual situation and offer them the hope that we have.

But many patients or colleagues will not want to talk about these things. Some who profess to be Christians around us will not necessarily believe the fundamental beliefs of the historic Christian faith. Our placements can often be fleeting, with lots to do, so we may not get a lot of time with the people we meet, limiting the interactions we can have.

The Saline Solution course helps in learning to use the opportunities and overcome the challenges.

I'd like to close with the three simple things from earlier; encourage yourself with them each day, and if you do so, then maybe next time you have an opportunity to speak of Jesus, you'll feel more able to do so:

- **God is in control of his word**
  - so you better believe it.
- **God is bringing judgment and salvation**
  - so repent and trust him.
- **God's messenger will be opposed but God will be with them to deliver them**
  - so don't be afraid. ■



help us raise  
**£80,000** to  
encourage praying  
Christian  
communities in every  
healthcare setting

[cmf.org.uk/appeal](http://cmf.org.uk/appeal)