

# Making evangelism a way of life.

## The Promise

### PODCAST OVERVIEW

#### Context:

- The presence of the Jewish people in Babylon made it a better empire
- Babylon = better because Daniel was there. Likewise, Egypt = better because Joseph was there
- Daniel, Joseph and others only have the rights of prisoners but they rose to the top. God writes the story
- They are enslaved by these empires, yet God writes the story and makes their presence in these places valuable. They bring value to the places and people who were opposed to God
- The exiles have lost the reference points of their own religion but they are driven back time and time again to a story they can cling on to: the Exodus

#### Dangerous Promises:

- As we navigate our own contexts, what do we go back to as a memory/story that connects us to God and motivates us to live for Him?
- We need to be prepared to make some dangerous promises that will bless the empire we are part of
- What does it look like when Christian exiles in the West promise themselves to be like salt and light?
- Daniel and Joseph don't ask themselves whether they should add value to the empires they're part of. They willingly do it. They make a dangerous set of promises saying that they will bless, serve and feed the empires that are enslaving them.
- We need to make similar promises today

#### Ecclesia:

- The word 'church' is an English word. An English translation of the Greek word 'ecclesia'.
- The English word 'church' is tied up in Christianity. In Paul's time, 'ecclesia' was very different. Paul took this word out of his culture/context and used it to bring meaning/expression to the Christian experience.
- We've probably missed what 'ecclesia' actually means!
- 'Ecclesia' would have invoked a strong reaction in Paul's listeners. It means 'the gathered ones', 'the called out ones'. A public display of a group of people. Used specifically in one particular instance which we'll look at.
- 'Towns and villages' mentioned in the Gospel. A village in the Bible was a collection of houses that are close together. 'Town' in the Bible was a collection of houses that had a wall around them.
- Walls around these towns were flimsy! Bits of sticks, pushed into the ground. Almost like a bush around the town – not really like our understanding of what town walls should look like!

- These 'walls' were enough to keep kids and livestock in, and thieves and other animals out.
- Towns with walls also had a way in. The way in wasn't a big gate, it was just a gap in the bush!
- In Jesus' time, sons in these towns had grown up being involved in and taught their fathers' family business from a very young age. When sons were in their late teens/early 20s the fathers (in their 40s) would hand over the business to the sons.
- When these fathers had handed over the family business, what would they do? Fathers remained in the town and helped out every so often in the family business.
- These men would become village elders. They'd sit at the opening in the village wall and talk to one another.
- Whenever an individual in the village had a dilemma that required wisdom, they'd approach the elders at the town gate. They'd sit with the elders and say "fathers and grandfathers of mine, I have a dilemma."
- The assumption was that no one person could answer the dilemma but collectively, a wise solution could be sought. The elders who give the advice are the ones who have to live with the consequences of the collective decision
- Luke 12:13-21 Jesus tells a man that he's not his village elder! Then goes on to tell a parable about a man who has a big crop and has more money than he knows what to do with. He decides to build bigger barns so that he can store up his wealth and live an extravagant lifestyle. But God comes in and says "you fool!"
- Crowd would have known before God's words that something about this story was off. Anyone in their communities who had a bumper harvest would have first gone to the elders at the town gate and said "fathers and grandfathers of mine, I've got more money than I know what to do with! What should I do with it?" Elders would discuss the problem and come up with a solution that would benefit the whole community – not just the individual. They would probably have told the man to build bigger barns!
- The problem with the man was not his wealth or building barns. This man is a fool because he hasn't reached out to the things of God. Luke 12:18-19: "I know what I'll do..." He thinks he is the master of his own destiny.
- The word used to describe the gathering of elders at the town gate was 'ecclesia'!
- Paul chooses this word to describe the church. Paul adds the image of the body, the family, etc to further describe the church. He recognizes that these people are the ones who have been called out of the village with the purpose of blessing and adding value back into the society they've been called from.
- Paul assumes that we will be a gift to the culture! We are where we are to add value. To help them love better, serve the poor better. We are where we are to make this a better nation.

Your context:

- Would your town or city grieve if the church ceased to exist?
- Society often sees Christians as a group who will take from, rather than give to, the community. This is sad!
- The attitude of the church is often "come to us", "join us", rather than "what can we give to you?", "how can I help you?"

- Imagine if you and the other exiles in your context made promises to add value to the lives of the people you live amongst?
- What kind of promises should we be making? We are servants of those we are called to. Therefore, what should we do? What should we not do? This isn't the sole function of the church but it was in the psyche of the early church.
- Ongoing service like this will cause those we serve to ask "why do you serve us like this?", "why are you adding blessing to this place?" Answer is simple: we are followers of Jesus. It's who he is, it's how he lived. So it's how we live, too.
- To be an exile doesn't mean that we withdraw from the world! We join in, we become part of it so that it becomes what it could never be if we weren't in it.
- What are the stories of a transformed university/town/workplace/city that you want to see? What are you going to do as a promise to see those stories become a reality?

#### Why & how?

- We see the world through the lens that God sees the world through.
- When we look at the world, people will be exposed to our dangerous stories of Jesus. It is our dangerous memories that cause us to move towards action and promises.
- E.g.: "we want to meet with you because we want you to see how much we love each other", "we have aligned our lives with the God of peace and justice, so we will always work for peace and will always be against injustice". We will give our clothing to the naked, visit the sick, feed the hungry. These are our promises!
- This is bread and butter Christianity!
- Why are these promises dangerous? They mean that we are now only as good as our word. They mean that we have to actually act on what we've promised.
- Is your context blessed because of your presence?

## When you gather together in your meet-up.

The space that we want to carve out needs to be;

1. **Welcoming.** A sense that you and the others belong.
2. **Safe.** Otherwise who'd ever take a risk. Practice confidentiality.
3. **Significant.** Your time and presence is valuable so speak and do the things that come from or arrive into that which is significant. Treat everyone as present even if they can't be with you.

## A few last thoughts

1. Do you understand? If not ask, either in your group or get in contact with Neville, Emma or David.
2. As the year goes by you will be reaching moments where you know what you next need to do in mission and evangelism. Self commitment is tough and often withers from pressure, distraction, fear or too much information. Who in your Xplore, Reunion or Envoy community can you ask to check in with you? It won't always be the same person, it's the one who resonates with your 'action plan'. They don't hold you accountable, you hold yourself accountable. They are there to challenge you when you don't bother with your commitment, to motivate you when it feels too hard. To laugh with you when it goes wrong. To pray for you throughout. Time bound it so it isn't a 'for life' thing!
3. When committing to an action, break it down into 4 or 5 next steps. The best way to write these and share them is to think what will it look like so I know it is happening?
4. Paul in Acts 15 describes a decision as seeming good to them and to the Holy Spirit. Keep checking in, teasing things out with this community and with God.