

Of all the news you watched, listened to or personally received in 2016 how much of it was good news?

Did you receive any good news this year you weren't expecting?

What could be good news for you in 2017?

When Jesus initially set out to reveal God's purposes for the world Mark records him saying is this:

Mark 1:14: After John was put in prison; Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Jesus declared to those around that something new was happening: - the kingdom of God has come near; repent or (turn from the wrong way you're living) and believe the good news.

The words good news can be shortened to the word gospel, (that's what gospel means) so that later when Paul who'd had an encounter Jesus when he wasn't even looking for him wrote to the young church at Rome:

Romans 1:16

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel (good news), because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

As a kid growing up in mostly Baptist churches I thought this was the good news.

I Romans 3:23: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God'

II Romans 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

III Romans 5:8: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

IV John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Now all this is true and good news – I am a sinner, I've fallen short of what God planned for me and for this I'm paid a wage (death) – whether that includes a contribution to Kiwi Saver I'm not sure.

I'm in trouble, I can't get out of this predicament but the Bible tells me someone has dealt to this - Jesus; when I believe in him I shall have life and as if that needed to be underlined John wrote this life is in Jesus and when we have Jesus, we have life. So the fifth verse for me is:

1 John 5:11-12: And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

These verses when I learned them and memorized them as an 18 year old became the foundation for assurance and gave direction to my life.

And if you've never seen this, never believed in Jesus I can only say you're missing out on life, both now and in the life to come.

But that's only the beginning. The good news (gospel) is about all our lives, all our living here and now.

And the good news is about many things.

Tim Keller, who has been used by God to make a huge impact on young urban professionals in New York states,

'The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.'

I'm currently reading his book 'Preaching.' In this he writes of the good news that is wide and deep and touches our culture's pressure points.

I want to conclude this message by mentioning his list of eight ways in which the gospel speaks to our time. (Don't worry I won't be elaborating on them too much). These are places where people who don't necessarily believe in Christianity or God feel they don't really deal with some of the major issues they face. These persons have a view of the world presented to them by the surrounding culture.

Some used to think the world was flat; others that the sun revolved round the earth, yet others that the moon is one gigantic cheese ball; others that white people are superior to other ethnicities. Some say there is no God; some say the universe evolved from a big bang; others say this world doesn't make sense without God.

After spending 27 years in New York as the pastor of a large and growing congregation, Tim Keller repeatedly came across young professionals who were searching for ways to deal with major issues that confronted them.

The eight he repeatedly came across were:

I Forgiveness

How do I learn to forgive others, or forgive myself, is it possible to begin again, does God really forgive? And which is harder to seek God's forgiveness or the forgiveness of someone we've really hurt. The New Testament speaks much about the need to confess our own sin but also the need to forgive one another. This is the theme of Friday's ODT opinion page – father who has forgiven 14 year old driver.

II Community

Where do I belong, how can I belong, and what does it mean to truly love others. An often repeated theme in the New Testament is that we're to love one another in Christian community, accept one another, work with one another and share with one another – this only has meaning in the light of community.

III Meaning

What is the meaning of my life; how do I find meaning in my life. Why am I here, where am I going? That's a real issue for young people now. In taking the funeral of a young man a few weeks ago I concluded that he must have got to the point of thinking there was no meaning for him in this life.

IV Contentment

Is life always about striving to have more, do more and be more? Paul writing after he'd been on the road for a number of years wrote **'I have learned whatever state I am in the be content.'**

V Identity

The Bible message is that we're formed in the image of God, made for relationship with him and find our greatest sense of being in this. There's a great scene at the end of the film *Dead Man Walking* – this film tells the story of a Catholic sister who's been asked to be the spiritual adviser to a convicted killer as his time for execution comes near. After going through the bravado of saying he didn't do it and the whole system was against him, finally in the hours before his death he acknowledged what he's done. She hears his confession and on the basis of Scripture she says he's forgiven; that he's now a child of God – his response – I've been called lots of things in my life but nobody has called me a child of God before. The Bible states that those who believe in Jesus are sons and daughters of the living God. That's our identity, that's who we are.

VI Freedom

Paul wrote **'You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'**

VII Hope

Is there any hope for me in this life? Is there any hope beyond the grave? I read on Wednesday at a funeral I was taking these words:

VIII Vocation

Peter wrote, **'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'**

So what's the good news - it deals with the major issues we encounter in life. The bad news is that it will never become good news for us until we trust Jesus.