

## Prepared to Give an Answer ???

Jeanne, 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020

Bible readings – 1 Peter 3: 13-18a (NIV), Matthew 13: 31-35 (CEV)

Psalm – Psalm 78: 1-16

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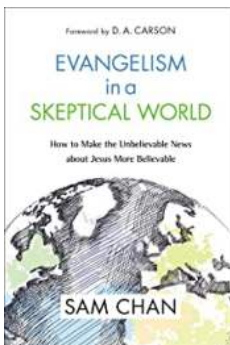
May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

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For a couple of days our bathroom had been smelling terrible. I checked that wet washing hadn't been left in the basket and started going musty, and that the soil in the pot plants was sweet. I couldn't find it. Then I went to do the washing and found the socks, hiding in plain view, in the small pile of our grandson's washing that I had volunteered to put through with ours! After soaking the socks in warm water and eucalyptus oil, hand washing them several times, and then machine washing them, both the bathroom and the socks were clean and sweet-smelling again. Advice to soon-to-be-married grandson – change your socks more often.

So, "Why am I telling you the smelly socks story?" you may well ask.

Well ... About a year ago, I was talking to Victor about a book another church was finding very helpful, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World* by Sam Chan.



He asked me if I would like to do a book review on it. I actually found this very difficult and challenging because of the technical language, plus the density of ideas and the totally new areas for me of philosophy and theology. But coming out the other side, there were some really exciting ideas.

So let's look at some ideas from Sam Chan's analysis of our culture and how that might help us communicate better. For example, when we look at this verse from today's Bible reading,

**But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15**

Can Chan's analysis of our culture help us obey God's word to us today? And how does this fit together with Jesus' use of stories in so much of his teaching?

We are not all called to be teachers. We are not all called to be evangelists. However, we are all called to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have. But, what would be helpful to say? How can we not sound as though we have all the answers? What if we are shy? How can we speak into our culture? How can we do it with gentleness and respect? What is the relationship between the gospel and culture? What questions are people in our culture asking?

Let's look at some of the things that Sam Chan had to say.

**sacred ⇔ secular**

He pointed out that there is such a big divide between the sacred and secular in current thinking in the culture in western countries, that Australia is a “defacto closed country” to the gospel. So how can we share our faith in this situation?

In the West, we live in a postmodern age now.

The Modern Age went from the 1600s to the 1980s – In modern thinking truth is objective, it can be measured, it is not influenced by a person’s biases, and it is based on a hierarchy of truth.

**Moderns** think that it is **all truth** and **no interpretation**,

So moderns think that it is all truth and no interpretation.

But, in the Postmodern Age – knowledge is subjective, it depends on our background and experiences; truth forms a coherent web, so you can have your truth and I can have my truth; our presuppositions shape our conclusions; all knowledge is shaped by our culture; science is narrow and dogmatic and is equated to scientism; there is no universal truth.

**Moderns** think that it is **all truth** and **no interpretation**,  
**postmoderns** think that it is **all interpretation** and **no truth** ...  
**the gospel is both-and.**

So postmoderns think that it is all interpretation and no truth.

But the gospel is **both-and**.

So how do Christians engage with our culture now, in a largely postmodern society?

While we continue to affirm the existence of truth, we should also acknowledge the role of community, perspectives and tradition in shaping our perception of truth.

It used to be that if we could demonstrate that something was true, people would believe it and eventually live it.

Moderns: **truth ⇒ belief ⇒ live it**

So, for moderns, the sequence was truth which led to belief which led to living it.

Moderns: **truth ⇒ belief ⇒ live it**  
Postmoderns: **live it ⇒ belief ⇒ truth**

But now, in a postmodern world, we must live it so that they can see that it is believable, and eventually come to see that it is true.

So, our non-Christian friends need to become part of our closest network, so that they can see that Christianity works.

Sam Chan gives about eight ways that we could engage with our friends and neighbours in a postmodern world. These include hospitality, stories, testimony, use of the arts, etc. I want to pick up on one of these ideas this morning, which is also the way that Jesus arguably used as his main method of teaching.

“I will use stories  
to speak my message  
and to explain things  
that have been hidden  
since the creation  
of the world.”

**Matthew 13: 35 (CEV)**  
quoting Psalm 78:16

Jesus' stories, or parables, are memorable. Who could forget the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son? Using stories invites others into our world and understanding, and opens the way for new ideas and meaningful conversations. How did we first meet Jesus? How has he helped us in a difficult situation? How has he been real in our life this week? Or something we have read. Or the story of a friend ...

We need to find a way into **any** culture. Don Richardson, who wrote *Peace Child* and *Eternity in Their Hearts*, believed that every culture has some story, ritual or tradition that can be used to illustrate and apply the gospel. (Chan, p152)



Don and Carol Richardson worked among the Sawi people in what is now West Papua. The Sawi were head hunters and cannibals who saw treachery as the highest virtue. When they heard the story of Judas, they cheered him as the hero. How could Don and Carol explain the gospel in this culture? Eventually they found the way.



The Sawi were often at war with neighbouring villages. The only way to make peace was for a father in one village to give his baby son to the other village, to live with them and be brought up by them. Peace could only come by a father being prepared to sacrifice his son.

This was the “redemptive analogy” that the Sawi would understand, the point of connection with the culture, the way in. God had given his son, Jesus, as his “peace child”. The whole Sawi people turned to the Lord and began sharing the story of Jesus with the neighbouring tribes. Over fifty years later the Sawi people are still following Jesus. (mnonline)

How can this story help us as we think about how to explain our faith to someone who asks us?

**... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ ...**

**2 Corinthians 5:19**

**<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

**Colossians 1:19**

Of course, reconciliation and making peace are entirely biblical understandings of the cross. We just need to think beyond what we are used to thinking and hearing. The way that the gospel was explained to us may not be the way that will communicate best to our friend. We need to think “outside the box”.

**And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.**

**Colossians 2:15**

In a culture where the fight between good and evil is more obvious, or where fear of evil is prevalent, it could be that Jesus is more powerful. On the cross he won the victory over evil. “It is finished!” was his cry as he had won the battle. And he is still more powerful today.

**... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

**John 8:36**

**And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice.**

**Psalms 50:6**

In sharing the gospel with our friends of aboriginal heritage we recognise the importance of relationship, truth-telling, justice and stories. Jesus knows the truth of both their history and our history, he knows their history of hurt, injustice and oppression. God is a God of justice. And he wants to set us all free from the bonds of the past so we can go forward together as brothers and sisters in him.

But what about in the prevailing culture in Australia today, a culture of secular humanism? Generally, people in western culture today don't relate to the idea of sin and salvation. “I'm not any worse than anyone else. I haven't killed anyone. I certainly don't need saving. I can do it by myself.” So, here too, we need to find different ways of expressing these ideas, different “redemptive analogies”.

So, back to the smelly socks story. Could this be a redemptive analogy? When we are feeling bad and can't forgive ourselves because of something we have done, or we are overwhelmed by hurt and discouragement, Jesus wants to wash us clean and give us a new start.

I got really excited about this whole idea and started seeing redemptive analogies all over the place.



Here's one of them. A large glass tabletop had been broken across the middle and looked as though it was only good to be thrown on the rubbish pile. But it had been reused to make a table on two levels.



It was eventually even used to hold a wedding cake.

What is the redemptive analogy here? God does not abandon us when we are broken. Jesus rescues us and wants to heal and restore us, not leave us broken and discarded. He restores us and remakes us into something beautiful for him, and then uses our experiences to help and bless others.



The classic example of a redemptive analogy where God takes our broken lives and turns them into something beautiful has got to be Kintsugi, which means “golden joinery”. It is the traditional Japanese art form where broken pottery is mended with a lacquer sprinkled or mixed with powdered gold. The final product is much more beautiful and valuable than the original.

One of the most well-known and dramatic stories of a life lived for Jesus, of turning something bad into something to be used for good, is *The Hiding Place*. It is the story of Corrie ten Boom and her family who hid Jews in their home in Holland during the Second World War, and Corrie and her sister Betsie's consequent imprisonment in the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany.

Betsie's almost final words to Corrie as she was being taken to the infirmary where she would shortly die were “[We] must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no depth that God is not deeper still. They will listen to us Corrie because we have been here.”  
(ten Boom, p378)





In 1975 a film of *The Hiding Place* was produced. In the final scene, Corrie herself appears and this is what she has to say:

Years later it was learned that my release came through a clerical error, what some might call a mistake. Not long after I was set free, women my age were put to death. Yes, I am Corrie ten Boom, in my 80s now. Some questions remain, but they are not to be feared. Our Heavenly Father holds all things in his hands, even our questions. As for myself, in the years since Ravensbruck, the Lord has sent me to some sixty countries, and I have told anyone who would listen, no pit is so deep that God is not deeper still. With Jesus, even in our darkest moments, the best remains, and the very best is yet to be. I promised my sister I would tell it, and I tell you.

So, as we go into this week, let's pray and look out for a story of God's blessing that we could share to bless someone else. Perhaps we can see a redemptive analogy. Perhaps God will help us in a difficult situation. Perhaps we may read something encouraging. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to care for someone. ...

If you don't identify as a Christian, perhaps you can still see how God has been at work in your life. What is he doing now? Can I challenge you to pray, "God, if you are real, please show me this week."

If you have come from a different cultural background, I would love to hear your story. What would be the best way to explain the gospel in your home culture?

Perhaps next Sunday we could share something of what we have found, how God has blessed or helped us, or what he has shown us.

Of course, all of this needs to be undergirded by prayer.

So, Father we pray for our nation, we pray for our state, we pray for our city, we pray for our suburb, we pray for the various subcultures around us, we pray for the young, we pray for the old, we pray for each other, we pray for our friends and neighbours, we pray for ourselves that you would inspire us with words that would really connect and that you would help us to be brave so that we can step out trusting you. We pray all this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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Chan S., 2018: *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI

ten Boom, C., *A Hodder Christian Paperback Omnibus – In My Father's House, The Hiding Place* (1971, pp 165-399), *Tramp for the Lord*

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Images from *Peace Child* [https://www.amazon.com.au/Peace-Child-Don-Richardson-ebook/dp/B00LA9G8HY/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?crd=XFOP5S6QI2SC&dchild=1&keywords=peace+child+book&qid=1600205594&sprefix=peace+child%2Caps%2C354&sr=8-2](https://www.amazon.com.au/Peace-Child-Don-Richardson-ebook/dp/B00LA9G8HY/ref=sr_1_2?crd=XFOP5S6QI2SC&dchild=1&keywords=peace+child+book&qid=1600205594&sprefix=peace+child%2Caps%2C354&sr=8-2)

Image of Corrie ten Boom <https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=MwglT4dZ&id=A9B895C1E41CAD389E32CA41F7D28CA074929B85&thid=OIP.MwglT4dZ36IJ1oEH2L6ySqHaEK&mediurl=https%3a%2f%2fwww.kcbi.org%2fwp-content%2fuploads%2f2019%2f11%2fcorrie-ten-boom.jpg&exph=450&expw=800&q=Corrie+ten+Boom&simid=607985975640854042&ck=65009C4FFB06DD72E6B79D61D66EBBD4&selectedIndex=84&FORM=IRPRST&ajaxhist=0>

Image of Japanese pottery [https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=huKtFlti&id=B26622AB2B6957D45D99771D075596CC152727AB&thid=OIP.huKtFltiT2iFgYDFQ4M3\\_QHaFO&mediurl=http%3A%2F%2F4.bp.blogspot.com%2F-5Si6scZcrpQ%2FUpB1-U4W0EI%2FAAAAAAAB1M%2F7U0SmToW\\_c%2Fs1600%2FSang-Bleu\\_kintsugi.jpg&exph=353&expw=500&q=japanese+traditional+pottery+gold&simid=607994664423788263&ck=D87E9CC5D1A4E0E5F4D59ECE706C8124&selectedindex=4&qvvt=japanese+traditional+pottery+gold&form=IRPRST&ajaxhist=0&vt=0&sim=11](https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=huKtFlti&id=B26622AB2B6957D45D99771D075596CC152727AB&thid=OIP.huKtFltiT2iFgYDFQ4M3_QHaFO&mediurl=http%3A%2F%2F4.bp.blogspot.com%2F-5Si6scZcrpQ%2FUpB1-U4W0EI%2FAAAAAAAB1M%2F7U0SmToW_c%2Fs1600%2FSang-Bleu_kintsugi.jpg&exph=353&expw=500&q=japanese+traditional+pottery+gold&simid=607994664423788263&ck=D87E9CC5D1A4E0E5F4D59ECE706C8124&selectedindex=4&qvvt=japanese+traditional+pottery+gold&form=IRPRST&ajaxhist=0&vt=0&sim=11)