



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

Far-Reaching Words

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A few years ago, NPR broadcast a story about a British fisherman who found a bottle in his nets. Noticing a note inside, he opened it and was amazed to find a letter from a soldier sailing off to war. That soldier died in battle and so that letter turned out to be his last words to his family. The fisherman began a process that fulfilled the soldier's request, and was eventually able to give the letter to his daughter.

Oh, about that soldier, his war, and his daughter: The war was World War I. His letter was written in 1914. When the letter was delivered to her, his daughter was 86 years old and lived in New Zealand.¹

For a writer, few things are more exciting — or humbling — than opening your mailbox (postal, email, or other media) and discovering a letter from someone you've never met, in a part of the country or world you've seen only on the Travel Channel, whose correspondence concerns some piece of writing you've penned. Contacts from Ireland and Haiti, from a former editor who once worked on a gospel paper published by a cousin, from the wife of a man now a Christian because of a tract I wrote — all are among this writer's occasional reminders of just how far-reaching the impact of the written word can be.

I believe God knew that. The use in Scripture of terms like *euaggelizō* (evangelize), *kērussō* (to herald, preach) and *logos* (word) make clear that God wants His message spread as widely as possible. The very existence of the epistles and gospels — *documents* designed to communicate with saints and sinners with whom the inspired writers were not physically present — testifies that writing is a vital part of the divine plan to spread the good news (see 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16; and 2 Peter 3:15-16 for evidence that those writings were supposed to be shared). To stress this is not to put writing in competition with other methods of proclamation, but to give it its

¹ I heard this story on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, April 13, 1999.

proper place among them. As Michael Green has said, “In addition to speaking to people about Christ, whether in public, in small groups, or as individuals, one further method was open to early carriers of the gospel. Those with the talent could write. And they *did*.”²

It is significant that after their own support is secured, the first thing many missionaries ask for is printing equipment. As Joe Barnett observed, “the printed word can be read at the time, place, and privacy of one’s own choosing, unlike fleeting, one-time sermons or radio and television messages. The printed word can be read, reread, studied and meditated upon, just as we do the Scriptures.”³

A young British soldier, deceased for 85 years, shows how true that is. When it comes to the printed word, we never know how far — in time, geography, or cyberspace — what we say will go.

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² Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 229.

³ As cited in Furman Kearley, “Evangelism Through the Printed Page,” *1989 Harding University Lectures*, 676.