

## Make Known the Gospel (Part IV)

### Introduction

Over the last couple of weeks, we've been looking at what the Bible says about evangelism. We've seen that relationships are an excellent context where evangelism can (and *should*) happen. Lifestyle can be a powerful adornment of our evangelism. It's a wonderful thing if people are saved through the preaching of the Gospel to the saints on Sunday morning. Meeting the physical needs of the unsaved can be another excellent context where evangelism can happen. But biblically, it seems best to stay away from associating any one of these things with a "method" of evangelism. Evangelism is the *sending* of *messengers out into the world* to *preach, and proclaim, and declare* the *Good News* with *words* to *anyone* and *everyone* who still needs to hear. So the only biblical method of evangelism is the *preaching* of the *message* of good news *with words*.

Last week, we saw how this method of evangelism is actually required by the content of our message and also by the only proper response to our message. The Gospel is a message of universal, authoritative, absolute truth. It's a message about sin, and guilt, and punishment, and coming judgment. And it's a message about the perfect and innocent Son of God being condemned to death in the place of sinners so that these same sinners can be forgiven and saved from the wrath of God, and have life eternal in the presence of their Creator. So it's the absolute authority of our message that invests *us* with a certain authority – an authority that shows itself in the biblical method of boldly proclaiming and preaching the Gospel.

The authority of the Gospel is also seen in that it leads always to a command: ***Repent***. And ***Believe***. And so the only proper response to the Gospel message is ***obedience*** to these two Gospel commands. If the Gospel is something to be obeyed, then certainly it is something to be proclaimed with authority and boldness to any and all who will listen!

So last week, we looked at what the content of the Gospel and the only proper response to the Gospel *has to mean* for our *method* of evangelism. This week, we're going to consider our *method* of evangelism in light of two more things – the sovereignty of God in salvation and the inherent power of the Gospel.

### I. The sovereignty of God in salvation and what it means for our evangelistic *method*.

What do we mean by the sovereignty of God in salvation? We mean the biblical teaching that before the foundation of the world, before any human being had ever lived and so therefore not based on anything at all that He foresaw in any person, but based only on the good pleasure of His own will, God ***chose*** in Christ all those whom He would save – which means that now the exact number of the elect is fixed, so that *only* the elect and *all* of the elect will, without any doubt, be saved and inherit eternal life. Paul sums this teaching up in Ephesians chapter one:

- Ephesians 1:4, 11 — [God] ***chose*** us in [Christ] ***before*** the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him... In him we have obtained an inheritance, having

been predestined *according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.*

It's natural for our human minds to struggle with this biblical teaching because it's a mystery that can only be finally resolved in God Himself. Romans 9 is a helpful chapter as we work to humble our thinking before God's truth.

But what we want to do this morning is ask: "What does the sovereignty of God in salvation mean for the Church's evangelism – and for our evangelistic method?" It shouldn't take much thought to see that the implications are massive! Put very simply, what this means is that God's elect are out there – needing, and waiting to be "brought in." Listen to what Jesus says in John chapter ten:

- John 10:14–16, 26–27 (cf. 4:34-35; Luke 10:2) — I am the good shepherd. ***I know my own and my own know me***, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and ***I lay down my life for the sheep***. And ***I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice***. So there will be one flock, one shepherd... but ***you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me***.

What we learn very clearly from these verses is that God's "sheep" are "*out there*." We don't know who they are, but Jesus *knows* them already by name because these are, in fact, the sheep for whom he has already laid down His own life. We don't know who God's sheep are, but *because* these are the ones for whom Jesus came to die, therefore He can make this promise – they *will* listen to His voice. (cf. John 5:25) Many of these people have *never yet* heard the Gospel. Many of them have *never* attended any church. And yet ***because of God's election and because Christ has already laid down His life for them***, there's a very real sense in which they can already be called God's sheep. The same thing could once be said about all of us! Think about that! And so here's a truth that *should* give us boundless optimism! What God's sovereignty in salvation teaches us is that our work of evangelism is ultimately just the task of going out to find and discover and bring in ***the sheep***. So we read in Acts chapter eighteen:

- Acts 18:9–10 — The Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, ***for I have many in this city who are my people [my sheep]***."

And then in chapter thirteen:

- Acts 13:48 — When the Gentiles heard this [good news], they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and ***as many as were appointed to eternal life [all the sheep] believed***.

Evangelism should be an endeavor full of a "deep-down inside us" confidence and optimism, even a 100% certainty of "success." Why? Because it is God the Father who has already chosen His sheep, and it is God the Son who has already died for His sheep. Therefore, *all the sheep will* come and be part of the one flock under the one Shepherd. They will listen to His voice and

follow Him, “and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of His hand.” (John 10:28)

So now all of us should naturally be asking this very simple and childlike question: What is the role of evangelism in this beautiful Big Picture of the sovereignty of God in salvation? What part does our evangelism play in the plan of God for the salvation of His sheep? To answer that question, we need to move now from the sovereignty of God in salvation to the inherent, life-giving power of the Gospel message.

## **II. The inherent power of the Gospel and what it means for our evangelistic method.**

The obvious place to start here is Romans chapter one. Paul writes:

- Romans 1:15–16 — I am eager to *preach the gospel* to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for *it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*.

What is *the power of God* for salvation? The Gospel is. And what does this mean? The Gospel of Jesus Christ (this message that we talked about last week) carries *within itself* the power of God to save. Not because it’s some magic formula or incantation, but because it’s the message *of Jesus Christ!*

- James 1:18 — Of his own will *he brought us forth by the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.
- 1 Peter 1:23–25 — *You have been born again*, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, *through the living and abiding word of God*; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” *And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

Now here’s a mystery. The Gospel is the power of God to save. It’s the power of God to give new life and cause us to be born again. And yet as we all know, the Gospel does not “work” the same way every time. It’s the power of God to save, and yet it doesn’t save everyone. It’s the power of God to give the new birth, and yet it doesn’t give the new birth every time. So does this mean that in our evangelism the Gospel only “works” occasionally – only some of the time. Not at all! Whenever the Gospel is preached or proclaimed, it’s always working.

- 2 Corinthians 2:12–16 — When I came to Troas *to preach the gospel of Christ*, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest... So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ *always leads us in triumphal procession*... For we are the aroma of Christ to God *among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing*, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

The message of the gospel creates a crisis of decision that does not allow anyone to remain neutral or to take a wait-and-see attitude... For some, the word about Christ opens

up the way of life; for others, the same word causes them to become even more hardened in their resistance to God and destines them for destruction. (Garland, NAC)

So you see, when the Gospel is preached, it's always actively working – either hardening people in their own unbelief or else saving people out of their unbelief. So what's the difference? Why does the Gospel work one way, one time, and another way, another time? Why does the Gospel work one way in some unbelievers, and another way in other unbelievers? Paul answers our question in 2 Corinthians chapter four:

- 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 — And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Who are the ones who are perishing? They're the ones whose minds have been **blinded** to the light of the Gospel by the god of this world and their own unbelief. So then, we should all be asking – “To *whom* is the Gospel *not* veiled?” Aren't we **all** blinded to the light of the Gospel by the god of this world and by our own unbelief? To *whom* is the Gospel *not* veiled? Paul answers this question in the very next verses of 2 Corinthians chapter four:

- 2 Corinthians 4:5–6 — For **what we proclaim** is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord... For God, who said, “**Let light shine out of darkness,**” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

To whom is the Gospel not veiled? – To all those to whom God Himself comes **in the Gospel** and speaks His sovereign, miracle-working, life-creating word: “Let there be light.” On the one hand, God never speaks these words apart from, or outside of, the preached Gospel. It was only in the Apostles' proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord that God Himself said to His sheep: “Let light shine out of darkness.” On the other hand, **whenever** God does speak these words, we know that **every single time** they can **always** be followed up with these words: “And there was light.”

You see, in evangelism the preached Gospel **is** the very power of God to save all those whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world. In evangelism, the preached Gospel **is** the very power of God that is able to save and **will** save **all** those for whom Christ has already shed His blood and died. The Gospel is not **just** a message – it's a message that is powerfully effective to actually save all of God's sheep. And so the Gospel not only commands repentance and faith, but it's **in** and **through** the evangelistic preaching of the Gospel that God sovereignly **grants** repentance and faith to all of His elect for whom Christ died. Maybe now we can understand what Paul says at the end of 2 Corinthians 2:16 – “Who is sufficient for these things?” Paul says in Romans:

- Romans 10:17 — Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Faith is **given** only and always through the hearing of the word of Christ. And so we read:

- 2 Peter 1:1 [NET; cf. PNTC; NAC; WBC] — From Simon Peter... *to those who* through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, have been *granted a faith* just as precious as ours.
- Philippians 1:29 (cf. Eph. 2:8) — It has been *granted to you* that for the sake of Christ you should not only *believe in him* but also suffer for his sake.
- Acts 5:31 (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25) — God exalted [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to *give repentance* to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
- Acts 11:18 — To the Gentiles also God has *granted repentance* that leads to life.

How, and when, does God grant this repentance and faith to the sheep for whom Christ died? It is always *in* and *through* the evangelistic preaching of the Gospel. The Gospel not only commands repentance, it creates the very repentance it demands in all of God's elect. The Gospel not only commands faith, it creates the very faith it demands in all of the sheep for whom Christ died. And so, when we preach the Gospel, can you fully understand now what we're really doing? We're preaching that which *is* the very power of God for salvation to all who believe. Indeed! "Who is sufficient for these things?"

So how is it that the Gospel actually creates repentance and faith in the elect sheep? Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

- 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 — For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, *because* our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

When the Gospel comes to those who have been loved and chosen by God, it comes not only in word (which would be but the fragrance of death), but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. In other words, when the Gospel is preached to the sheep for whom Christ died *it is the Holy Spirit Himself who accompanies the message* in a special way, powerfully working repentance, and the full conviction of faith *always by means of the message that they are hearing*. (cf. John 16:7-11) And so now the message of the Gospel—instead of being the fragrance of death to those who are perishing—is the fragrance of life to those who are being saved!

Can you see, now, how the sovereignty of God in salvation and the inherent power of the preached Gospel go hand in hand? God the Father has chosen the sheep and given them as a gift to His Son before the foundation of the world. God the Son has now shed His blood *for* those sheep, therefore guaranteeing their salvation. And now God the Holy Spirit accompanies the evangelistic preaching of the Gospel to work repentance and faith in *all* of the elect sheep for whom Christ died. So it's the preaching of the Gospel by mere human beings—by frail men, and women, and children—which *is* the very power of the triune God to save all of His sheep – from our perspective, *all* and *any* who will believe. Who, indeed, is sufficient for these things?

## Conclusion

Can you see now, maybe as never before, that evangelism should be an endeavor full of a “deep-down inside us,” “full to overflowing,” confidence and optimism? And can you see now how utterly foolish and insane and wicked are the people who say that if God is sovereign in salvation, we need not be earnestly preaching the Gospel? (Rom. 10:14-17) To the contrary, Paul writes:

- 2 Timothy 2:10 (cf. Titus 1:1) — Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Listen to what Peter says as he’s fervently preaching the Gospel:

- Acts 2:39, 41, 47 (cf. 16:13-14; 13:48) — “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, *everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*” ... [And then Luke comments:] So those who received [Peter’s] word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls... And *the Lord added* to their number day by day those who were being saved.

We need to remember that the goal of our evangelism is never just people agreeing, but the miraculous creation of a “new person,” a “new birth,” the “raising of the dead.” How utterly hopeless this must feel – *unless* we understand the sovereignty of the Triune God in salvation, and the miracle-working, life-giving power of the Gospel message that this sovereign, triune God has entrusted to us. When we understand this, far from being hopeless, we can know that we actually have the 100% certainty of “success.”

What does the sovereignty of the triune God in salvation, and the miracle-working, life-giving power of the Gospel message *mean* for our method of evangelism? It means that we don’t have to manipulate – in fact, we *must* not. We don’t have to be subtle and smooth. We don’t have to be eloquent and persuasive. We don’t have to use gimmicks, and entertainment, and polished performances. We don’t have to be able to argue and debate. We don’t have to feel knowledgeable and educated and smart. We don’t have to look for *any method* other than the *one* the Bible has given us! We can be fully confident simply in the power of the *preached Gospel* to conquer unbelief and to work true repentance and saving faith in *all* of God’s elect sheep.

We live in a day when the church has very little confidence in the biblical method of evangelism. So some churches have little to no evangelistic zeal. To what extent might this be us? Other churches are resorting to different methods of evangelism, believing that the end justifies whatever methods we can use. Inevitably, what happens with these other methods is that the “offense” of the Gospel is subtly compromised; the exclusive truth-claims of the Gospel are “unintentionally” minimized, and the authoritative command of the Gospel that requires obedience is somehow lost in all the “loving relationships” with the unsaved.

But once again, as we’ve seen today it is the Spirit-empowered *message* of the true, unadulterated Gospel—*all by itself*—that saves – and nothing else! I think of what the angel said to Cornelius:

- Acts 11:13–14 — Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will **declare** to you a **message** by which you **will be saved**.

And I think of what Paul said to the Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 2:1–2 — And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know **nothing** among you except **Jesus Christ** and **him crucified**.

If we're truly confident in the power of the *preached Gospel* itself to create repentance and faith in *all* of God's elect sheep, I wonder how might this change our perspective on existing as a church planted here in the community of Morris? How might this change our perspective on the *possibilities*(!) for evangelism in Morris? It's through the bold and authoritative proclaiming of the true Gospel message to **anyone and everyone** who still needs to hear that God has purposed, and promised, to bring in His sheep. So how will this also enable us to be more joyful and confident in preaching the Gospel to our unsaved neighbors, and co-workers, and acquaintances? Would you pray with me that our practice as a church and as individuals would truly reflect a **confidence** in the miracle-working, life-giving power of the message that has been entrusted to us? And would you rejoice with me that this Gospel message has already worked in our hearts the miracle of true repentance and saving faith?