

Confident Evangelism, #2

Confident Evangelism

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Well, again, it's my privilege to welcome you to the first Sunday of 2016 at Truth Community Church and we're so glad that you're with us after the holiday season has come to an end and now we turn our thoughts to a new year. I'm delighted to be able to start it here this Sunday by opening God's word with you. We're taking a short break and it ends today, from our exposition of Ephesians to consider the matter of evangelism and last week we started a two-part message called "Confident Evangelism," and I want to be very clear as to why we are studying it here. It is not because I feel like there is a lack of evangelism that goes on in the midst of your lives. You know, our church started some four years ago, a little over four years ago, and we were able to fit into a living room at the time in that first meeting and now we're in a room like this where there are close to a couple of hundred people with us, and that's a tribute to the work of God, it's a tribute to the faithfulness and the goodness of God and we thank God and give him the final praise for that, but my point in saying that and mentioning it is this: it's that our church has grown without any kind of marketing whatsoever. There has been no direct marketing; there has been no radio ads; there has been no newspaper ads or anything like that. We haven't done that. We realize that other churches do that, God bless them, may he prosper the Gospel wherever it goes out, but we haven't done that, and that tells us something very important and just something very obvious: our church has grown because you as a congregation have been speaking about Christ to others. You have been speaking about Christ; you have been speaking somehow, inviting people to our church and that's how people have come to Truth Community Church, it's because you have been vocal about your faith. So what I'm doing here today is affirming that, hopefully giving you some things to strengthen you still more in what you're doing, but it's not the point of this series to lay a guilt trip on somebody for not speaking about Christ enough, rather this is to help us understand what it is that we rely on, what it is that we trust in, what it is that we are to be when we are talking about Christ with those who don't know him.

So with that sense in mind, that's where we are coming as we approach the Scriptures here today and here's what I want you to know, here's what I want you to walk out of: we all probably have had that sense of maybe a bit of reluctance of sharing Christ in a particular situation, a little bit of reservation about how is this going to be received and having something about a little bit of a hesitation, and what Scripture would teach us is that that's totally unnecessary. What I would want you to know, what I would want you to walk out of, is that you can be absolutely confident when you share Christ with those

who don't know him even if they are hostile; even if they are indifferent, even if they mock you, you can stand your ground, as it were, and be firm and be clear and be joyful as you speak about Christ in those circumstances. You and I can share in the attitude that the Apostle Paul opened the entire book of Romans with when he said in chapter 1, verse 16, he said, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Well, how is it that we can be confident? How is it that we can be unashamed as we are proclaiming Christ when Christ is not welcome in this world? How is it that we can be bold in the face of opposition? How is it that we can be serene when people don't even want to listen to us? Well, that's what this message is about and this message is not so much about exactly what you say in those circumstances, but rather it's more about what it is that informs your entire approach; it's bigger than any particular approach or any formula for evangelism. This gives us the whole reason, really, why we believe the Gospel. It gives us why we are confident in Christ and it gives us the sense of how we carry that as we go into the world.

And beloved, here is what I want you to know: it's not just that we are not ashamed, it's not just a purely negative thing in a positive sense, Scripture would teach us and lead us into this attitude that when you speak about Christ, you should do so with a sense of supernatural conviction and supernatural confidence that what you are saying is true; that what you are saying you expect God to bless; and what you are saying is the most important thing that that person could ever hear in their entire earthly existence. So we're not deterred by the fact that people are disinterested or uninterested is actually the correct word there, that people are hostile, we're not deterred by that because we realize that we are speaking on mandate from our Lord himself who said, "Go and make disciples." We speak and the warrant for our speaking the Gospel either in individual circumstances or from a pulpit, our warrant is not the permission of the world, it is not the permission of the person who stands in front of us, our warrant for speaking the Gospel, the basis, the authority from which we speak, is because our Lord has commanded us to do so and that's why we speak. It's because, you see, there is an entire vertical dimension to this that we simply need to understand and so as we proclaim Christ from this pulpit, as you proclaim Christ in your life to your family, to your friends, to unwilling loved ones, here's five truths that I want you to remember as you do to give you confidence and that which would inform and make you even more bold and confident as you are evangelizing the lost.

The first two points we covered last week. I'm just going to touch on them very briefly. Five truths for you to remember as you are speaking the Gospel. First of all, remember the sufficiency of Scripture. Remember the sufficiency of the Scriptures. God in his word has given us everything that is necessary to convert a soul. We don't need principles of man-made psychology to help people find Christ. That only darkens the issue; that only puts a veil over it. It doesn't help. We don't need clever marketing techniques. We don't need to manipulate people and pretend to be saying one thing when we're actually trying to say something else. No, what God has given us in his word is completely sufficient and adequate to lead a soul to saving knowledge of Christ. That's what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:15. The Bible says, "that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are

able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." That's 2 Timothy 3:15. The Scriptures are adequate. In the Bible we have everything that is necessary to show someone that God is holy, that they are sinners, and they are under judgment. In the Scriptures, we have everything that is needed, everything that is revealed that shows that Christ is a sufficient Savior in our sins; that his death on the cross paid the price that was necessary to reconcile sinners who were separated to a holy God. And we find in the Scriptures that that gift is received through faith, not through rituals, not through works that we do, not through man-made efforts, but simply entrusting ourselves and receiving and resting in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's where salvation is found, and you don't find that knowledge, you don't find that wisdom in any other book than in the 66 books of the Bible.

So it's not just that the Scriptures are sufficient to lead a man to saving faith in Christ, that knowledge and that wisdom and that revelation is found nowhere else and so as you are sharing Christ in the year to come, as you are with family members who are hostile and belittle you, I know that you have all gone through that as you speak with those who are entrapped in cults and even your loved ones that don't see the deception that they have been in bondage to, beloved, trust in God's word. That's where the power is. That's where the truth is. That's where the wisdom is that will lead people to fear God and turn to Christ. It won't be found anyplace else. So as you're doing evangelism, as you are speaking about Christ, rest your hope and confidence in this inspired word of God. It is inerrant. It is powerful. It is strong to save. It is perfect to convert a soul and so we rest in God's word. We love God's word because it's sufficient.

Secondly, what else gives you confidence in evangelism? Secondly we said last time: remember the seriousness of sin. Remember the seriousness of sin and this gives us confidence by understanding the nature of the task that is at hand. The unbeliever, Scripture says, cannot evaluate spiritual things. When you wonder why it is that somebody has a blank look on their face when you're speaking about Christ to them, when you wonder why they react against the truth, remember the seriousness of sin. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that, "a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." And so understand that when we go and we share Christ with someone, when we command them, when we call them to repent and believe in Christ, we're calling them to do that which is impossible in their natural state. It's like telling a blind man, a man born blind from birth to see. It's like telling someone who is deaf to hear. That's how serious the problem is. You see, they don't need just a little boost in the right direction. Jesus said they need to be born again, they need new life from above and a natural man who is dead in trespasses and sins does not have the natural capacity. He does not have the ability to save himself or even to exercise faith in Christ on his own. It requires a work of the Holy Spirit in his heart in order for him to be saved.

There's another aspect of it as you're sharing and this is very important to remember and those of you that are in your teen years, I'm so glad that you can hear these things early on. Some of you need to be converted yourselves but for those of you that are young in age and also young in Christ, this sets trajectories for how you interact with people and

I'm excited that you can be here to hear it. You we need to understand that that lost person that you're talking with, you need to understand that Scripture teaches us that they are not an equal partner in the pursuit of truth. The sinner is biased against the Gospel. Jesus says they don't come to the truth because they love darkness; they love their sin. And so that teaches us not to be confident in their ability to understand and it also teaches us not to be confident in our rhetorical ability or in our knowledge in order to convert them. It's beyond that. It's beyond human ability. The seriousness of human sin is such that it requires a supernatural act from God for that person to be saved because the sinner wants to protect his independence from God. He wants to protect his love for sin and when you come with a Gospel that convicts him, when you come with a Gospel that says there is no one who is good, not even one and that includes you, when you come and say you are not fit for heaven, in pride they will react against that. Their inner motions of their heart will say, "This is a threat to my life, to what I love, to what I want to do. This is a threat to my independence." So they react against it.

Well, do you see how this helps you as you're sharing Christ? What this does is that rather than you getting intimidated when you see that kind of reaction or starting to think, "You know, I must be doing something wrong because now they suddenly they don't like me. They don't want me to talk this way." Rather than backing down at that moment of conflict, you can say to yourself in your heart, it's in your mind, "This is exactly what I should expect. This is what sin does to someone that when the saving Gospel is presented to them they attack it." And when that happens you can say you understand, "Oh, this is sin on display. This is the seriousness of sin. It's not that I'm doing something wrong, it's that spiritual reality is being engaged." And over time as that happens and then someone starts to turn and soften toward the Gospel, you can recognize, "Okay, here is the work of the Spirit of God on that heart because they are receptive in a way where they used to be hostile." So the seriousness of sin helps you understand what's going on when those evangelistic times take place and you're condescendingly dismissed. "Yeah, that's good for you but I don't need that." Well, you can understand what's going on. It informs the dynamics.

But if sin is that serious, how will your words ever get through, then? If the natural man cannot understand the things of the Gospel that are given to him and you and I certainly don't have the power to reach into his soul and convert it, how is it then that we even have any success in evangelism whatsoever? Well, that brings us to our new material here and it brings us to our third point this morning and that is this: to remember the saving Gospel. Remember the saving Gospel and, oh, do I love this point. This point is what gives me the strength week after week to stand in a pulpit and preach. It's not because there's any power in me, in anything that is said, the power resides in the saving Gospel. Mark this, this changes everything as you're speaking and it focuses you in what the content of what you say is going to be: there is supernatural power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that transcends human limitations. Things that are impossible with men are possible with God when we honor the saving Gospel of Christ.

Look at 1 Corinthians 1. We looked at this passage on a Tuesday night not too long ago, about four months ago maybe, and so we're going to rehearse some of those things that

we saw back then. 1 Corinthians 1:22 through 24. Paul here is speaking about the power of the Gospel. In verse 18, chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, he says, "the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Do you see how crucial this is in light of what we just said about the seriousness of sin? The natural man cannot understand spiritual things. You and I know from experience that we don't have the power to save anybody on our own. If we did, all of our loved ones would be converted, right? And the very fact that we have loved ones in our lives that aren't saved and we want them to be saved show that we are helpless to accomplish it in our own ability. That teaches us to trust not in ourselves. You should not trust in your own ability. You should not trust in the wisdom of the unsaved man, rather when you understand the seriousness of sin, it puts you in a focus where you want to rely on the saving Gospel and that is what the Apostle Paul is describing in his own ministry in 1 Corinthians 1.

Look at verse 21, he says, "in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God." The world, the unsaved realm, the unsaved man, does not have what is necessary to find a saving knowledge of Christ. He cannot save himself. That resident power is not in his heart; that knowledge of the Gospel does not exist in the natural mind. Therefore what is it then, how is it then that anyone can be saved? How is this dilemma resolved? It's through the saving power of the Gospel. It pleases God for man to be shown inept and unable to save himself because then when someone is saved, someone like you in times gone by when you were saved, it shows that you don't get the glory for it. All of the glory goes to God and it pleased God to save men in a way that only he could get the glory for.

Look at verse 21 again, "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." You will be considered, you will be counted, you will be called foolish, silly, stupid, for saying the things that you say about the Gospel. The words that Paul used here speak of someone being considered a moron. We have to understand that and embrace it and say, "I realize the world considers the Gospel to be foolish, to be moronic, and that means all the more I'm going to be committed to the saving Gospel because that alone is where God is pleased to bless and to save."

Look at verse 22, he says, "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom." The Jews wanted a miraculous display of power to vindicate a claim for someone to be the Messiah. Greeks sought for wisdom; they loved human rhetoric. Paul says, "I know what they want. I know what they want when a speaker speaks to them, but I'm not giving it to them." What they want, the audience does not define what it is that we say or what we do when we're evangelizing according to Scripture. Paul says in verse 23, "but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness." Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified. We preach that the Son of God hung on a cross in order to reconcile men to God and we understand that that causes Jews to stumble and we understand that Gentiles think that that's silly and in light of that and with full knowledge of their rejection, we are undeterred." That's exactly what we preach. We stay on the message of the saving Gospel of Christ because that is what God is pleased to use to save those who believe.

Verse 24, he says, "but to those who are the called," those that God inwardly works with an effectual call to bring them to Christ, "both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." You see, when you're evangelizing, when you are sharing Christ with the unsaved person, it is not your goal, it is not your purpose in order to be accepted by them. That's not the point. The point is that what you say would be pleasing to God and would actually carry the power that is necessary to convert their souls. An unsaved person does not know what is good for his soul. An unsaved man does not recognize the glory of the Gospel in Christ unless God opens his heart and so you can't have it both ways. You can't be faithful to the Gospel and at the same time try to say something that is going to be pleasing to the natural man. Rather, your goal in evangelism and what gives you confidence is you say, "I am here. I speak in order to please God and to be a vessel of that which would have converting power in the heart of that person, although in this initial moment, they are rejecting it."

That is what gives you the courage and the understanding to stay on message even when it is being rejected. Paul said, "I know what they want but I'm not going to give it to them. I preach the simple message that Christ was crucified and resurrected for sinners and he is the only Savior of the world and if some men reject that, that doesn't deter me or detract me from doing that which I know that God has called me to do." It's the same for us today. God hasn't changed. Christ hasn't changed. The condition of men in sin hasn't changed. Nothing has changed and so we follow the same apostolic pattern and we preach Christ crucified because that is where the saving power of the Gospel resides. So, beloved, as you speak about Christ, remember that it is not your job, it is not what God calls you to do to tell unbelievers what they want to hear. That's like asking a kid who needs a nutritious meal, "What do you want for supper tonight?" and they talk about wanting candy and all of that stuff. You wouldn't let a young child define his diet for himself when he has no idea of the principles of nutrition. Well, in the same manner, you don't let an unbeliever dictate to you what the Gospel should be. He's not the bearer of good news, you are. So you stay on that message. God takes what unbelievers despise and works in their hearts and changes them and opens hearts to believe in Christ.

So as you have an opportunity to share the Gospel, dwell on basic themes that seem simple perhaps to us, but are the very simplicity and clarity is what unbelievers need to hear. You should be telling them things like this: the Bible, the 66 books of the Bible are the only authority for truth. That needs to be clear, clearly stated. You are calling them to the authority of Scripture. You should be clear in telling them, "You are a sinner. You fall short of the glory of God and his judgment is upon you. His judgment is on sinners. You're not the good person that you think you are in the sight of God." They need to hear that. They can't be saved unless they hear that. And you see, I understand that people react against that and balk against it and, "Who are you to say that? And I know some things about your life," that's what family loves to say back, isn't it? "Who are you to tell me that I'm a sinner?" Well, look, you can't be deterred or distracted by that reaction. Think about it, you want to be faithful to God and you want their soul to be saved, they have to hear that they are a sinner who falls short of the glory of God or they'll never know what they need to be saved from. They need to know that there is a final judgment

coming and it will not go well for them in their natural state. Unless they hear that, they will never be awakened to their need for a Savior.

So you can't trade off the future well-being of their soul for a momentary acceptance in them that softens the edges of the Gospel. We can't do that and be faithful to Christ. We can't do that and be faithful to their souls. They need to hear it. They must hear that they fall short; that they have broken the law of God; that they are guilty before a holy God and they are unable to save themselves. They have to hear that if they're ever going to be saved because faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. You tell them that Jesus Christ is the only Savior. You tell them that there is an exclusivity about the Gospel and all paths do not lead to God. Jesus said that the way to life is narrow and there are few who find it. They must hear that, especially in this pluralistic world in which we live. They must hear the exclusivity of Christ. They must hear that he said, "No one comes to the Father but through me." They must hear that and they must hear Jesus' command to repent and believe in the Gospel. You must turn from sin and humble yourselves and receive Christ if you are to be saved. They need to hear those themes simply, clearly stated, these things that are basic to you as a Christian: the Bible is the authority; you're a sinner; Jesus Christ is the only Savior; you must repent and believe in Christ in order to be saved. Now, you see, it's not that complicated. Those aren't intensely complex theological themes. They're rich, they're deep, they are true, but it's easy to save those things and emphasize them in a spirit of trust that the Spirit of God will be pleased to use that in your life. Be clear. Be direct. Let me say it again, beloved, because that's where we all fall short: be direct. State it plainly so that it cannot be missed, and those simple themes are what God will be pleased to use in the hearts of those who hear.

Now, you might say, "Ah, can it really be that basic? Can you really distill it into those themes?" I'm not saying that this is comprehensive, I'm simply saying that these are the themes that you emphasize, these are the talking points that you have in your mind and as the conversation unfolds, God will give you wisdom, the Spirit of God will help you expand on that as he applies it to the heart of the one that's in front of you. "Can it really be that basic? Don't you need a seminary degree to share the Gospel with someone?" No, let's not ever think that way and in an evangelical world where academic attainment is almost worshiped in some circles and I'm not opposed to academics, don't get me wrong, I prepared for ministry, but what I want you to see is that you don't need a seminary degree in order to be an effective evangelist for Christ. Absolutely let's put that thought out of our mind. Every one of you who is saved is equipped to be an effective evangelist.

You say, "Can it really be that simple? There are so many things to know." Well, let's look at some great names in history. D. L. Moody, the great evangelistic, was converted when a Sunday school teacher spoke to him the Gospel while Moody was working in a shoe store. Simple encounter in a common everyday workplace. Charles Spurgeon was converted by a simple message that was being preached by an unknown pastor in a virtually empty chapel. John Wesley was converted when someone was simply reading Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on the book of Romans in a small gathering. Luther himself was converted as he studied Romans 1 in the privacy of his own room. Do you know what that is saying? Do you know what that illustrates for us? These great men

of God were all saved under the most unimpressive of circumstances. There wasn't a laser show going on on the platform in order to captivate them and to bring their attention to the Gospel. There wasn't anything like that. There wasn't a suave Ph.D. speaking to them. By modern standards, the men who were involved in being the vessels of the Gospel to these ultimately great men of God were simple, humble, comparatively uneducated men, and the situations in which these men were converted are so similar to the situations in which you as a Christian today share the Gospel: in the workplace, in your home, in your neighborhood. You see, there is great power in the Gospel that far transcends your human ability and when you speak these simple basic themes of Gospel truth to an unbeliever, it pleases God to bestow his power on that in his timing and in his way in order to bring someone to Christ and that is the simple way in which, it's simple from a human means, the power is great, it is majestic, in some ways it is mysterious in the way that God chooses to work, but we understand that this is the means and the vessels that he uses, and you, beloved, can be confident in Christ as you're speaking about him. You can be confident in the Gospel. You don't need the approval of the one to whom you are speaking in order to obtain the approval of God which is infinitely more important. And beloved, what you need to see is that clever arguments aren't going to save anyone. You know, there are pastors who claim that they can convert anyone if they just find out what their felt need is. That's not true. Salvation belongs to the Lord and it's not in our resident power in order to convert anyone at will. God saves souls when you and I focus on the Gospel.

I've given you this quote from Charles Spurgeon before but I like it so much that I'm going to use it again. Talking about the simplicity of the Gospel and the fact that some won't hear it in their pride, that it's contrary to the spirit of our educated age, here's what Charles Spurgeon said and I quote, he said, "This talking about Christ crucified is said to be archaic and not at all suitable for the refinement of this wonderful age, but our mind is made up and our foot is put down. If it be foolish to preach up atonement by blood, we will be fools. And if it be madness to stick to the old truth just as Paul delivered it, we mean to stick to it. For we are persuaded that the cross of Christ which stumbles so many and is ridiculed by so many more, is still the power of God and the wisdom of God. Yes, just the old-fashioned truth, if you believe you will be saved. That we will stick to and may God send his blessing upon it according to his own eternal purpose."

The simple saving Gospel viewed as foolish by the world is the saving power of God on display and our desire as Christians, our desire as a church, what your individual heart desire should be is, "I just want to be faithful to the same Gospel that saved me." And when you have that focus, you can say, "Okay, this is where the power is. I can't guarantee that God is going to save any one person in a particular spot in time, but I know that this is the message that God uses and therefore I am going to limit myself. I am going to stay with this Gospel for the sake of fidelity to Christ in hopes that God would bless this soul with conversion." It simplifies things a lot. And when you're drunken family members mock you, you can come back and you can rest your soul and you can rest your confidence and you can look, as it were, for the pleasure of God and the smile of God upon what you're doing. They rejected Paul. They rejected Christ. Jesus said they will reject us too because a slave is not above his master. We embrace that. We embrace

that. Oh, that we would join in the sufferings of Christ, that we would have a taste of the rejection he experienced on earth as we are faithful to the message that he entrusted to us. We're not put off by the world's rejection. We realize that persecution and rejection from the world is a blessing from God because it shows who we belong to. So remember the saving Gospel.

Now, there's another aspect. There is always a sanctifying aspect that comes as we interact with God's word on any topic. There's another aspect that you need to remember. That brings us to our fourth point this morning. We said that you remember the sufficiency of Scripture; you remember the seriousness of sin; you remember the saving Gospel. That brings us to our fourth point and it is this: remember the spirit of gentleness. Remember the spirit of gentleness and what I want to do here in these few moments here is to turn your attention now to your own heart as you share the faith. Some of you like to debate and win an argument. Some of you when someone disagrees with you your blood starts to boil and you get a little bit irritated by the fact that someone doesn't agree with you. Others of you are a little more tender and sensitive in spirit and you get your feelings hurt or you get frustrated when an unbeliever insults you. We all, wherever we fall on that spectrum, we all need to be sanctified and grow a bit here because your attitude is part of the proper approach to evangelism. When you're thinking about sharing Christ, you need to realize that there is some self-examination that you need to do as well.

Turn in the Bible to 2 Timothy 2. I want to show you just a couple of places where Scripture directs us to be mindful of our own character and our own disposition as we are dealing with unbelievers. In 2 Timothy 2:24 it says, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition." You see, there's a context here. Those who are opposing the Gospel, Paul says under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says, "You be gentle when you're correcting them if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Scripture says that the anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God and there should be nothing of an angry spirit, of contention or hatred in your heart when you're sharing Christ. There should be this spirit of gentleness that recognizes the sad nature of their estate; the sadness that this soul in front of you is on the brink of eternal woe; and that your words would be gentle, that there would be a pleading, a love that is evident in what you are saying; that this isn't simply an abstract theological discussion for me as I'm having this discussion with you. I love your soul. I care about you. I want it to be well with you throughout all of eternity. And when that is conscious on your mind, it will move your heart in the spirit of gentleness.

Look over at 1 Peter 3. In some ways we could have, perhaps should have started with this verse but we bring it in here. 1 Peter 3:14 and, beloved, what I want you to see here as the word of God would strengthen you in your evangelism, make you more confident, is to realize that there is something for you to grow in spiritually here as well. It's not just that they need to hear the Gospel. The whole matter of evangelism brings up our own spiritual growth, our spiritual maturity, our spiritual attitudes. And Peter, to his readers

said, "even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled." Again, Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel." Peter says, "Don't be afraid. Don't be intimidated when they bring their opposition to bear upon you."

What does he say in verse 15? "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." There should be an earnest gentleness and a gentle earnestness in your words as you're sharing Christ with the unsaved. God commands that from us. You know, you see what people say online and in internet discussions and it's just so contrary to this spirit, isn't it? We're not meant to be argumentative, boastful, demeaning people as we share Christ. That's not the spirit in which the Gospel is to be presented. We need to be mindful of that. We need to line up not only with God's truth revealed in Scripture, we need to line up our hearts with what he wants us to be as we interact with the lost. God commands a gentle spirit and, beloved, I encourage you never to underestimate the power that that has.

Maybe I've mentioned this in the past. When I was a young man and I was not a Christian, I worked in a retail drugstore and I was working late one night. It was close to closing time, about 9 o'clock and I'm running the cash register and this young girl, had to be in her mid teens, came in very modestly dressed and she came in and she handed me a tract. I have it to this day. I have that very tract still. She handed me the tract and she said, "I'd like you to read this." That's all she said and I gave her a condescending smile. I knew it was something about Christ and I gave her a condescending smile and I sent her on her way. She had no reason to think that what she said to me mattered to me at all based on how I responded but do you know what the truth of the matter was? Her gentle spirit completely disarmed me. The simple sincerity in which she made herself vulnerable and said, "I would like you to read this," there was something in her demeanor that was so different than anything that I had known and certainly was completely different from anything that I was in my own unregenerate state at that time. I went home and I read her tract and it exposed me to the Gospel. I wasn't saved then but it was kind of a leverage point which made me start thinking about spiritual things. But her kindness and her verbal witness was a starting point that God used to begin to draw me to himself and I would venture to say that for many of you, especially if you're a first-generation Christian kind of like I am, that somehow there was something in the love and the demeanor of the person who shared Christ with you that grabbed your attention, that arrested your thought, that made some kind of distinction in your mind because that gentle spirit was so contrary to the cynical, crass world in which you are accustomed to living in and the gentle spirit gave a stamp of authenticity to the actual verbal truth that was being shared with you.

So, beloved, with those things in mind, with those Scriptures in mind, cultivate a gentle spirit in your witness. Don't be afraid to tell them that you care about them, that you love them, that's why you're telling it to them. That you're not simply trying to win an argument about the existence of God so that you can be the debate champion. This isn't about your pride or mine, is it? It's not about who gets the upper hand in an argument or

in a discussion or who can prove to be more intelligent than the person in front of them as if comparative pride were the way that God would advance the progress of the Gospel. No, there should be a sense that they know that you love them, that you care about them, and that's the spirit in which you share it. And if they reject that loving gentle spirit, then their blood is on their own head. There is no excuse for rejecting saving truth from a loving heart and your sympathetic witness just might be more effective than a brilliant book on apologetics in the life of that person that you're talking to.

So, beloved, I say this by way of encouraging you to recognize that, you know, even if you're slow to speak, you're not quick with an answer, to realize that that does not mean that you cannot be an effective evangelist for Christ. And on the other hand, if you are sharp and you've got an answer for everybody, God bless you for your discernment and your ability to recognize truth in a short amount of time. God bless you for that. Just realize that a gentle spirit is supposed to animate you too. This is the command of God, not simply a word of man. You see, confident evangelism is going to spring also from that Christian who knows the truth and also goes the extra step and examines his own heart to make sure that the spirit of his witness conforms with what God calls us to be.

Well, that brings us to our final point this morning, point 5, and this is the best one of them all. Point 5 is: to remember the Savior's presence. Remember the Savior's presence. In light of everything that we've talked about, you know, the men lost in sin, the lofty nature of Scripture, the saving power of the Gospel and we're even mindful of our own weaknesses and how we fall short in our own attitudes. It's beyond our power to save someone and we realize that we don't always have the spirit that we should have, well might we say with the Apostle Paul, "Who is adequate for these things? How can I possibly be used? Who is adequate to represent a perfect Savior with sinful lips? Who is adequate to know the truth that is necessary? Who is adequate for these things?" Well, when you're thinking rightly about that it does bring you short and you say, "How can I be effective before men who are hostile to truth? How can I when I'm easily offended maintain a gentle spirit in the face of insults? I say things that are wrong and the words come out wrong and I forget things, you know, how can this happen? How can I be used this way?" Well, it is a challenge. It's a supernatural challenge but, beloved, Christ prepares us. Christ has given us the provision.

Look at Matthew 28 and with this we will soon close. Matthew 28:19 and 20, Jesus speaking to a small group of disciples just before his ascension, sending them out into a hostile world says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Now, I'm really glad that our Lord didn't stop there and just leave it there with the bare command about what we are to do because in light of everything else that we've said here today, in light of the greatness of that commission, you realize that it's lofty. He was talking to a group of 11 men telling them to make disciples of all the nations. The sheer human impossibility of that, and to realize that we are sent out now, today, to people who are hostile and we feel ill equipped, and yet we are commanded to teach them and to bring them into a discipling relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is adequate for these things?

But Jesus didn't stop there. Jesus perfectly knew the impossibility from a human perspective of what he was saying. He perfectly knew that you and I would feel weak in the task. Perfectly knew that we would stumble and fall along the way and that there would be times where it seemed like unbelief was getting the upper hand and we were tongue tied and weak and reticent to speak. He didn't stop with I command you in verse 20. What did he say in verse 20? He said, "and lo, along with that, alongside what I have commanded you to do," he says, "lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." As we go and make disciples, we do not do it alone. We do not do it in our own power. We are not dependent on human techniques. We are not dependent on their receiving what we say in their own natural ability. As we go corporately, as we go individually, naming the name of Christ to those who do not know him, Jesus says, "I am with you." In his great omnipresence, he is with us in the task. In his great omnipotence and in his great saving purpose for the lost, he is with us to help us, to lift us and elevate us beyond our natural ability; to go beyond the human capacity of our words and our earnestness to accomplish supernatural results through very human and imperfect messengers like you and like me. When you share the Gospel as a Christian, you're not alone. Christ himself is with you to empower your witness. Christ himself is there to comfort you in the midst of the rejection. Christ himself is there to work in the heart of unbelievers and when you see, when those blessed opportunities come and someone suddenly is soft, someone suddenly says, "I see this. Yes, I want to follow Christ," and they start to show understanding of Scriptures that they previously found to be locked to them, what are you witnessing other than the presence and the power of Christ being manifested through your witness.

So Christ is there and it's the invisible but certain presence of Christ that gives us our confidence; that Christ blesses his people when they do what he tells them to do and carry the Gospel to those who don't know him. So remember the Savior's presence. You're not alone when you share the Gospel and his power is what we rest in. So with Paul, don't be ashamed of the Gospel. With Spurgeon, put your foot down. Let unbelievers insult us. Let atheists mock us. Let scientists scorn us. Let the pope condemn us. Let liberals attack us with their books. Let governments try to silence us. And giving voice to our persecuted brethren in the Middle East, let radical Muslims threaten us. Despite all of the opposition, we will still preach Christ crucified with confidence, with gladness, with earnestness. We will evangelize as Christ gives us opportunity without fear, without shame, with confidence, with boldness, with the expectation that God will use our witness to save some of those with whom we speak.

So whatever comes, beloved, proclaim Christ with confidence. He will use your witness to deliver others from the kingdom of darkness and bring him into the kingdom of his glorious light. And do you know what's on the end of that whole process? Do you know what lies at the end of a life of faithfulness to the Gospel? Do you know what should motivate you and give you great hope as you walk out of the room here today? It's that one day soon, one day soon whether it's a few hours or a few years, one day soon, Christian, Christ is going to receive you into his heavenly home. You're going to be there with him. The fruit of the Gospel in your life will find its culmination. The purpose for which you were created will ultimately be fulfilled in the presence of the glory of Christ,

looking into his face, transformed into his image, belonging to him forever, sin banished from your soul, sin banished from your presence forever and we just are there to enjoy his presence, to worship him and to reflect and see his glory with one another forever and ever and ever amen. That's the outcome of the Gospel. Can't wait, can you?

Let's pray together.

Beloved, we do have an awesome privilege in Christ and as you think toward the future, as you think toward this year, as you think toward this day, let's you and me have it in our hearts, let's take others to heaven with us. You know, I've primarily spoken to Christians this morning. Are you here and yet you realize that you do not know Christ? Let me share some simple evangelism with you. The Bible is the authority and you are a sinner before a holy God. You're separated from him. You're under his judgment. Jesus Christ came to earth and shed his blood to save sinners just like you. He will receive you. He will forgive you. He will welcome you into his presence. He commands you to come. He commands you to repent and believe in him. Won't you obey today and do just that and find eternal life?

Our Father, show forth your power to save sinners as we proclaim the Gospel from this pulpit and in our individual lives. Father, give us fruit, give us results, would you? Would you actually convert sinners through our witness in the coming year? Father, we're not content simply to be saved ourselves and we're not content simply to speak, Father, we want the results. We want to see the fruit of conversions. We want to see people saved through the witness of Christians in this room this year, and yet we know that we don't have the power to make that happen on our own. We'll be faithful, Father. We will go out. We will speak of Christ but, Father, we ask you to bless that word and to sanctify it for the salvation of souls that you'll bring into our paths. Let us come to the first Sunday in 2017 reflecting back, looking back and seeing how you have saved some through the ministry of the lives of the people who claim this as our church home. And as we share, Father, as we share Christ, give us confidence that is worthy of our perfect Lord and Savior. Give us a confidence of serenity, a fullness, a boldness that is worthy of the one true Gospel and never to be ashamed, never to shrink back from the disapproval of this world. If we have your approval, Father, we have all that we want. So we commit these things and ourselves to you as we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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