

Christ Sends Some and Forbids Others

Biblical Evangelism

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Bible Text: Mark 1:40-45; Mark 5:18-20

Preached on: Sunday, February 28, 2010

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If you will hold your place in Mark chapter one and then also find Mark chapter five, we are going to be dealing with both passages of Scripture this morning.

One of the things that is needful as we come to the Word of God is to always compare Scripture with Scripture. If we take any one particular verse or even a passage of Scripture by itself and its teaching alone, we can substantiate almost anything from the Word of God. The task and the goal of the Christian and, in particular, of the pastor is to not just simply take one passage of Scripture, but all of Scripture—now, in itself that is impossible to do on any given Sunday. I can't preach the entire Bible in one day. As many of you may think I have tried, I assure that you it is an impossible task and I really have not set my sights on it yet.

So for us as believers that involves the regular exposure to God's Word Sunday after Sunday together under the Word of God, in our own reading, in our studies, constantly being exposed to the Word of God so that we take what we read and we put it in balance.

As we have been going through the issue of evangelism this concept of balance is one that is necessary. We are often told—at least I was often told—let me put it to you that way—growing up, that every Christian has an obligation to proclaim the full message of the gospel and in the same way and in the same manner. To put it another way, we are told that everyone is commissioned under the same moral obligation and to the same extent in the same manner for preaching the gospel.

Now last Lord's Day we looked at John chapter 20 and verse 21 where Christ says to his apostles, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."¹

And that statement of commissioning is a commission to the apostles. What we saw last week from the Word of God is that kind of commission is not something that we take upon ourselves. I don't stand up or, for that matter, no one should stand up and proclaim themselves a messenger for God. Christ chose his disciples, Christ chose his messengers and he commissions them. He did so in person while he was alive or in the days shortly after his resurrection and before his ascension. And that commissioning carries on now

¹ John 20:21.

by means of the local church. The Church sees in its midst men who are gifted for the Word of God, gifted for separate tasks and different aspects and the Church commissions with the authority of Christ.

In pastor Jarrett's prayer he reminded us that regardless of the size, when believers gather together under the authority of Christ—and that is what in his name means, two or three gathered together in his name, that that gathering, that calling together or coming together of believers, bears the authority of Christ in its midst. And the authority that Christ possesses or has to commission apostles and preachers of the Word of God now is vested in the Church, the meeting of the gathered saints, and the Church commissions pastors and teachers and evangelists for the preaching of the Word of God.

Now in distinction to that many times we are told that, no, no, no, the way you should see it is that each individual has this obligation of proclaiming the full message of the gospel on a regular basis, that we are all commissioned and we are all commissioned in the same way and to the same extent and in the same manner.

One of the passages used to justify this kind of an approach is Mark chapter five and verses one through 20. Mark chapter five is the story of Christ coming to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It is about the middle of what is called his Galilean ministry. For the first part of his ministry Jesus is in the north of Israel. He is up around Capernaum and Lake Galilee and he travels to Tyre and Sidon and a little bit over to Decapolis which is this area of the city of Gadara is in the area called Decapolis. And it isn't until later in his ministry that he finally makes the trip to Jerusalem and, in fact, the last several weeks of his life that he makes his final entrance into Jerusalem leading up to his crucifixion.

So that a good bit, if not most of his ministry is actually spent in the Galilee area. Christ is there in the area of Galilee and in Mark chapter five we have the story of him crossing over to the eastern side of that sea into this area known as Decapolis.

Decapolis literally means 10 cities and it was a league of 10 cities that had come together under Roman government, kind of formed its own province. It was not necessarily Jewish. In fact, most of the people that lived there at the time were kind of a mix of everything. Think New York City. You know, think Brooklyn. You know, only spread out over an area, 10 cities. You have got a little bit of everything and that is kind of what Decapolis was.

When Christ comes to this area we are told in Mark chapter five that he meets a man demon possessed with a legion of demons.

Start reading in verse one.

Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with

chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him.

And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!" Then He asked him, "What is your name?"

And he answered, saying, "My name is Legion; for we are many."

Also he begged Him earnestly that He would not send them out of the country. Now a large herd of swine was feeding there near the mountains.

So all the demons begged Him, saying, "Send us to the swine, that we may enter them."

And at once Jesus gave them permission. Then the unclean spirits went out and entered the swine (there were about two thousand); and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned in the sea. So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. And those who saw it told them how it happened to him who had been demon-possessed, and about the swine. Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region.²

One of the oddest verses in the gospels.

And [so] when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."

And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.³

² Mark 5:1-17.

³ Mark 5:18-20.

In this account of the healing of the demon possessed man, verse 19 is often used as a text, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.”⁴

And out of this particular text is drawn the application or the command that all of us are equally commissioned, that all of us are to go home to our friends and to tell them what great things the Lord has done for us and how he has had compassion on us, that every Christian is, by virtue of this story also commissioned as though we were the ones in this place, in this position.

And so verse 19, “Go and tell what great things the Lord has done for you,” becomes a universal command.

The problem with this is that if we are going to take that approach, we would have to be uniform. We would have to be consistent, would we not? If every time Christ gives instructions to someone that he heals and those instructions involve the gospel or preaching or teaching about Christ and we take those instructions and universalize them and apply them to ourselves, then we have to be consistent. And if we are going to be consistent, what do we do with the fact that there are many times, more verses in the gospels where Jesus forbids someone to make him known, where Jesus specifically commands someone, “Don’t tell anybody”? Are we going to universalize that also?

If we are going to come to the story of the demon possessed man in Mark five and say, “Go and tell your friends,” and take Jesus’ statement to him as our moral obligation, then am I also going to take instances elsewhere in the gospel where Jesus gives the exact opposite direction and make that my moral command also? And, if so, how am I going to on one hand tell everyone and on the other hand tell no one?

How do I balance this out?

You see, the task is not take a passage of Scripture and what do you get out of it. The task is take the Bible in its proper balance and what does the entire Word of God teach you? That is why Paul is so careful to tell the Ephesians, “I declare to you the whole counsel of God.”⁵

Let me give you some illustrations, some examples. First of all, I am going to exclude the ones where Jesus is casting out a demon and commands the demon not to speak. That I can understand. Ok? After all, it is not like he wanted a demon being an evangelist. Ok?

So I think there are very obvious reasons for those accounts. But let’s set those aside.

Matthew chapter nine and verse 30, Jesus heals two blind men who cry out to him, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

⁴ Mark 5:19.

⁵ Acts 20:27.

And after he heals them he tells them to tell no one.

They have recognized him as the Messiah, Jesus, Son of David. And he tells them to tell no one about him.

Matthew chapter 12 verses 15 and 16 Jesus has crowds come to him and he heals the people in the multitudes, the crowds and tells all of them not to make him known.

Matthew chapter 17, Jesus has been on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John who have seen Christ transfigured in glory. They have seen Moses and Elijah speak with him and they have heard God the Father speak from heaven, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." And on the way down from the mountain Jesus tells them, "Tell no one what you have seen until after I am raised from the dead."

In Mark chapter five we have this story of the man cured of the demons in Decapolis who is told to proclaim to his friends what great things God has done, but if you read just a little bit further down in the rest of this chapter you will find the story of where Jesus raises a young girl from the dead. And while he is on his way there to the house and the crowd is following him, he stops the crowd and allows no one to follow him except for the girl's parents and Peter, James and John. And he takes them into the house. He puts everyone else out after they have laughed at him because the girl is dead and he says, "Why are you mourning? She is not dead. She is sleeping." He has his perspective on death that is a whole lot different than ours. And he puts them all out and he takes the mother and the father, Peter, James and John and he goes in and he raises her from the dead and he tells them what? "Tell no one about it."

There's two more I want to bring your attention to. Turn, if you will, to Matthew chapter 16. We are going to start at verse 13.

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said...⁶

And, by the way, the other gospels reveal that Simon is answering for the whole group, not just for himself.

Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

⁶ Matthew 16:13-16.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.⁷

This is the problem. You see, there are several instances or special occasions that you might come up with to help explain this phenomenon in the Scriptures in the life of Christ. In some cases you can see how Jesus out of humility and lowliness of spirit and in submission to the Father did not want himself to become the focus of attention. He wanted the message of the gospel to be foremost, not his healing ministry. You can understand that.

He did not come to seek his own glory, but the glory of the Father. So in some circumstances you can understand why Jesus makes this correction not to make himself known.

In some cases you could understand that the timing of his ministry is just not right, that there is a time when he will reveal himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, but not just yet. You understand that.

In some cases, perhaps, he is even protecting his disciples from persecution from the Jewish leaders. In some cases he may be bringing his disciples along slowly in their understanding.

But the difficulty of all of this is that regardless of the reason and regardless of the motivation behind it or the circumstances, we have to correlate these two things together. And the reason we have to do so is because salvation is found in Christ Jesus alone. There is no salvation apart from the name of Jesus Christ. There is no forgiveness of sins apart from knowing that he is the Son of God, that he is sinless and he and he alone is the sacrifice for our sins so that whatever the reason or whatever the purpose, when Jesus tells someone, "Don't tell anybody what you know about me," you must understand that there were sinners in Israel who died without salvation while Christ is telling men to not make him known.

And that is what we have to balance out with the rest of the Scriptures.

⁷ Matthew 16:16-20.

I believe it is Matthew 11 where Jesus tells the Jews in the synagogue, “You know, in the days of Elijah the prophet, there were many widows. But Elijah was only sent to one. And in the days of Elisha there were many lepers, but only one got healed by Elisha.”

And he was getting across to them that God chooses to whom he is going to give his blessings. And regardless of how you put it all together you must come to this conclusion, that the publication of the gospel is a blessing that God chooses to give to some and not to others.

When Paul is going through Asia Minor he wants to go into Bithynia and the Holy Spirit says no and points him instead west to Greece. And as a result you and I have the gospel today and much of Asia does not.

God chooses upon whom to send the blessing of the preaching of the gospel. And in some cases he commissions one to go and in another case he forbids someone else from going.

So in Mark chapter five we have the story of the demoniac, the man healed and Jesus commands him to, “Go to your friends and tell them what great things God has done.”

For my example this morning and in contrast to this, if you will turn back to Mark one, the leper that comes to Christ imploring him to be healed and Christ heals him and in verse 44 he said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone.”⁸ And in Greek it is actually a good double negative if I remember correctly. “See that you say nothing to nobody,” a very emphatic statement.

“Go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’ However, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the matter.”⁹

Jesus very specifically says, “Don’t tell anyone,” and he disobeys.

I want you to read... or I will read to you John Calvin’s commentary on that passage of Scripture. It is in your bulletin if you want to find it. It is on the page of the devotion. It is the last paragraph.

“Our Lord had a particular reason for wishing that the report of the healing should not be immediately spread or at least not by the leper. The leper was so far from deserving praise for his disorderly exhibition that he ought, in my opinion, to be condemned for not obeying Christ’s injunction. He wished to express his gratitude to him to whom he was indebted for his cure, no better method could have been found than obedience which God prefers to all sacrifices. This example shows us that those who allow themselves to be guided by inconsiderate zeal act improperly because the more eager they are to please God, the greater their rebellion to his commands.”

⁸ Mark 1:44.

⁹ Mark 1:44-45.

That is a phenomenal observation. Jesus Christ orders this man. Jesus Christ is Lord and he tells him, "Tell no one." And he goes out and publishes it. And how many of us have heard sermons praising this man for doing that? Simple fact of the matter is, he was disobedient to the Son of God.

Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone."

Now how do we correlate these two together? And the principle I think I would like to give you is this, that in evangelism the limits of our evangelism, the scope of our message is determined not by us, but by God.

And you say, "Well, of course."

You need to wrestle with that. How and when and under what circumstances and by what method is not for you to determine. It is not for you to say, "Well, gee, I think I will go and do it this way. I think I will decide to just take this method. That is how I am going to do it."

We live in an age of individual authority, of self authority. And we come to a passage of Scripture like Mark five and Jesus dealing with the man cured of the demons and, "Go and tell your friends," and we look at that and we just universalize it and then not only do we universalize it and apply it to ourselves without any careful thinking, but to make it worse, we devise the method as to how I am going to do it.

True story. I knew a guy who said that his ministry in evangelism was taking gospel tracts and going into the men's stalls in the bathroom, unrolling the roll of toilet paper and then rolling it back up with a gospel tract about every two turns so that as you are reaching over for the paper out at your feet comes God's way of salvation.

We have had all kinds of ridiculous notions and ideas and people invent them. We anoint ourselves as prophets and devise our own method of prophecy instead of submitting to the Word of God.

The simple balance of it all is this that Jesus commands one and he forbids another and that is his sovereign right. And you and I must be obedient to that sovereign right. There is no other way to correlate these two things.

Let me give you some principles from Mark five and then we will give you some principles from Mark one. We will try to put these together and then make some ways that we could use this in our lives, some applications.

First, Mark chapter five. What does Jesus tell the man cured of the demons to do? Let's note very carefully verse 19 and 20. In verse 18 the man wants to go with Jesus. He wants to be a follower of Christ in Christ's company. First we notice that Jesus does not permit him to do that. Secondly, he tells him to go to his friends—and by the word

friends we are talking about neighbors and those that live around him. Third, to tell them what great things the Lord has done for him and then how God has had compassion on him.

But there are limitations to this man's ministry. Christ has commissioned him, but there are limitations as to what he can do at this point. And I want you to notice these limitations. Notice the limits that Christ places on his work.

First of all, he was limited from his desire to follow Christ. He wants to be in that company. I don't think he is asking to be made one of the 12. I don't think he is asking for something. He is just, "Lord, I want to be with you. I just want to follow you. I want to hear your teaching. I want to see you at work. I just want to go with you."

And Christ says, "No. You can't do that."

See, one of the limits that sometimes Christ places on us is the kind of way we want to devote our lives.

There are times, young men, when it may be your desire to serve God full time and God doesn't let that happen. Or he doesn't let it happen all of your life. Part of your life yes and part of your life no. There are times where you wish you could devote your life to a ministry full time. God says, "No. I have other work for you." And in his providence and in his command and his wisdom and his directions, the answer is, "You can't do that."

This man wants to follow Jesus and be with him and he is not allowed to do it. Not only that, he is not only limited in his desire of following Christ, Christ limits him in who he would reach.

In verse 19, "Go home to your friends."¹⁰

He doesn't say to him, "Go to Jerusalem or Tyre or Sidon." He doesn't even tell him to go all through Decapolis although the man may have done so. We are not told for sure. But the direction is just simply, "Go to the people that you know." He is limited in the audience that he would reach.

Third, he is limited in his understanding and his message. "Go tell your friends what great things the Lord has done for you and how he has had compassion on you."

Ask yourself this question. What does this man know of Jesus Christ at this point? What does he know? Assuming that he even remembers what the unclean spirits have said when Christ comes and that they called him Jesus, Son of the most high God, let's assume that he knows that. Let's assume that he knows that Jesus is Jesus Christ, the Son of the most high God. What else does he know? That he has healed him, that he has authority over demons. What else does he know? Not much.

¹⁰ Mark 5:19.

Jesus does not commission him to go and preach that Jesus Christ is going to die on the cross, raise again on the third day and ascend to the right hand of God the Father and that salvation is only in his name. He doesn't even commission him to go and tell him great things, what great things I have done for you. "You go and tell your friends what great things the Lord has done for you." And that's it.

We are told, you know, if you don't tell someone the full gospel message you are just not witnessing. If you don't share with them everything Christ did, then that is just not evangelism. Christ commissions this man in a limited way to a limited audience with a limited message.

And from history we know that he was limited in what he was allowed to see as a result of his work. We have no idea how long this man lived. We have no idea his identity. We do know that during the ministry of Christ the time period of when Christ is alive and shortly thereafter, there is not much result in this area of Decapolis. But we also know that by the time Saul of Tarsus is persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem and when he is on his way to Damascus which is part of this area of Decapolis, there are churches already established there. And I will warrant that God uses the ministry of this man like a plow on dry ground to prepare the way for the gospel that would come later.

This man does not even have a full gospel message. He is limited by Christ's directions, by Christ's commands. But he is obedient. He fulfills his role. He fulfills the function that God has given him to do. That is evangelism.

You see, being a witness for Christ means that sometimes you are limited in what you know and what you can say. Sometimes it means that you are limited in who you can reach and what your audience is. Sometimes it means that you may not see the results of the seeds you plant. But that doesn't mean you are not being a witness for Jesus Christ.

The problem is that we become discontent.

Christ gives us, by his command and by his circumstances that he orders for us, a role to fill and we get discontent with it. And we hear all these sensational stories, all these thousands of people being reached for Christ and all of these decisions being made and we go, "Gee, that is not happening with me. You know, maybe I just need to pack up everything I own and go move someplace and start this marvelous ministry and I just need to do something dramatic. I need to sell my house, sell my car, empty out my bank account, put everything we own in 10 suitcases and me and my wife and my kids to lower Slobovia and be a missionary," and never ask whether or not Christ has commissioned me or directed me to do so.

And I am not talking about some direct subjective, "Gee, I feel like Christ wants me to do this." I am coming to the church where Christ says he will dwell, coming under the authority of the local church and asking, "What can I do as a member of the church to fulfill the Great Commission," instead of launching out on our own in some

individualistic fashion and just assuming that what Christ has directed to one, he has directed to me.

Being a witness for Christ means you may be limited in how and when and where and in what manner and that is ok, because there are clear teachings in the Word of God as to what you should do to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Fulfill those teachings. Follow those commands.

And that leads me to the second story that you will find in Mark chapter one. In Mark five the principle is this. Christ's limits, Christ decides whether you are going to have a gift of pastor, teacher, deacon, evangelist. Christ decides the circumstances of your life. Christ places you in context. Christ instructs you and opens your mind and teaches you. It is he that gives you various gifts and places you in various circumstances and in different manner in the body of Christ so that we function together. It is Christ that puts limits on you.

Principle from Mark chapter one is this. When Christ gives you directions, don't you disobey them. When you open the Word of God and you read what he tells you about living a wise life and obeying his commands, don't you in some inappropriate zeal disobey Christ's commands thinking that you are doing him an honor and a service by witnessing for him in a disobedient fashion.

Christ's directions for us supersede our direction for ourselves. Christ's commands for us supersede your personal zeal.

The Church has difficulties in this culture in large part because Christians take this individualistic zeal as an excuse to disobey God. I have heard disobedience upon disobedience countenanced and excused under the name of, "Well, that is just my burden for Christ."

No it is not. It is your pride and discontent.

The man who anoints himself a street preacher apart from the authority which Christ has placed in his church is disobedient to Christ. The person who devises their own concepts of ministry or witness or of whatever without coming to the Word of God and seeing what God tells us to do, may have all the zeal in the world, but as Calvin said, "The more eager they are to please God, the greater their rebellion to his commands."

In Mark chapter one Jesus very specifically instructs this cleansed leper to tell no one, but to go show himself to the priests and offer for his cleansing those things which Moses commanded as a testimony to them. It is a testimony to who? The priests.

Do you think there are some priests in Jerusalem that needed to hear or see this cleansed leper? And instead of obeying Christ he goes out in his own zeal and in his own authority, tells everybody and the result is Jesus can no longer enter the city. Jesus can no longer teach. Jesus can no longer function as the prophet of God and instruct the

people in the gospel because if he attempts to enter the city he just gets thronged with these multitudes who all they want is just to be healed and be fed. This man's exuberance and disobedience was a setback to the effectiveness of Christ to teach in that city.

Now he may excuse it as, "I have just got to tell everybody what Jesus has done for me," and in the process what he has done is destroyed the ministry of Christ in that city.

Have you ever witnessed to someone who has been witnessed to before and the ministry is just all but destroyed and the gospel is all but just annihilated, where they have been told, "You know, if you just come to Christ you will be happy, satisfied. God will fix your marriage and your car"?

And so they give the religion thing a try and they wind up disappointed and then you come with the gospel and all they have is anger and bitterness. So here is this man where Christ does something marvelous for him and in disobedience he spreads the word, "Jesus healed me." And now all the city cares about is temporal things and they are not listening to Christ's Word about salvation and he can't enter into the city and teach and his disobedience has ruined the ministry of Christ in that city.

Let me give you three principles. One, you may not witness in a way that violates God's law. Christ's instructions to this leper shows him that his obedience to the law of God was more important than any desire he may have had. You may not witness, quote, unquote, in a way that violates God's laws.

You say, "Well, of course not. I wouldn't do that. It is not like I would go out and hold a gun to somebody's head and say, 'Convert or I will kill you.'"

But let me give you some ideas. If you are at work and you are working for your employer, you may not rob your employer by taking his time away from your job to witness for Jesus Christ. Your employer does not pay you to be a personal evangelist. Now, you have got free time or you can work it in and you are not, you know, interrupting your job and it doesn't bother your employer or your work environment, that is fine. But if you in your zeal are taking upon yourself this so called ministry and in doing so you are disrupting the work place and you are robbing your employer of his... of what he is paying you, then you are violating God's laws in your zeal to be a witness. You may not do that.

There are some men I know of who in their desire to be a witness or a preacher for Jesus Christ have foolishly endangered their families. And I think I can place myself among them, for I have committed the sin of placing my family in dire financial straits in my desire to be a preacher. I have known guys that have packed up everything they owned in the back of a small station wagon and moved 1500 miles to a place they have never been before, don't know a soul, to start a church because they wanted to be a pastor. Didn't have a job, barely had two dollar bills in the wallet when they got there and arrived absolute paupers based on merely the feeling that God wanted them to do it.

And yet I read in my Bible that a man who does not provide for his own is worse than an infidel and has denied the faith.

You cannot use any means or method that you think of or that you desire if it contradicts or does not hold strictly to the practices laid out for us in God's Word. And you can come up with all kinds of things. And I was reminded of one that deacon Dean Geliard, he was telling me about that on the way in guess what I saw headed out? Motor cycles, row after row after row. And so there have been all kinds of ideas. Let's have a Sunday motorcycle ministry. Let's, you know, the blessing of the bikes, I think is what he called it. After all, that is our way of witnessing.

Christ's Word says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."¹¹

"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some."

The example of the New Testament is that it is in the church that we are to be to commemorate the resurrection of Christ.

"Well, I am witnessing."

"No, you are not. You are violating God's commands."

We may not excuse our disobedience on the basis of desire or zeal.

Third, I think this passage in Mark one teaches us that we should not undermine the role of worship as a form of witness. This leper who has been healed has been commanded to go and to speak, or, excuse me, to offer up the offering in the temple that Moses commanded him as a testimony to the priests.

You see, the people in the temple need the witness of Jesus Christ, too. There are others who need to hear the gospel. And sometimes those others are right here.

One of the greatest witnesses to the gospel that I would point to in my life is the faithful worship of men who were not my parents, but men who every Sunday and Wednesday night were faithful to the household of God, faithful to the church. And that strengthened my faith as a young man to see others hold fast to the testimony of Jesus Christ.

You may not even have children or they are all grown and out. Your faithfulness as a witness to others in this congregation... And I am going to add this. I think when we get to heaven, I think many of us are going to be surprised to find out when it was we truly came to faith in Christ. I really do. I know our faith grows and is strengthened as we go through life and through the things that God brings our way, but I honestly believe there are going to be many of us who get to heaven, who have made professions of faith that we thought were genuine early on in life and we find out that we really did not

¹¹ Exodus 20:8.

understand the gospel until much later. And it was ministered under the faithful testimony of the Word of God that brings us to Christ.

You see, the Church needs the testimony of Jesus Christ also.

Those who are outside see us worship and they have been witnessed to by our faithfulness. Those inside see you worship and have been witnessed to by your faithfulness. Others hear of what God has done for you and we are discontent with the idea of bearing witness to Christ in the church.

Christ's command to this leper was, "Go to the temple, offer what Moses commanded you as a testimony to the people there worshipping God."

Do not undermine or underestimate or under value the worth of your testimony in the church.

Somehow we are not witnessing unless we are going out.

I need to hear your witness and you need to hear mine.

In summary, then, Jesus Christ in his Word has given us a variety of ways and means and methods and circumstances in which he commissions some and forbids others. But evangelism, bottom line, is not under our control. It is not our invention. It is not for us to go, "How can I invent a new method or a new ministry or what can I decide that I am going to do? It is not for us to craft or to shape any way we desire. The gospel is not like play dough. God gives us the method. God gives us the message. The commission comes from Christ through his apostles, through the Church built on the foundation of the apostles. And it is through the Church that we carry out the Great Commission, each of us in different ways and different manners and different means. We all have different friends. We all have different stories. We all have different backgrounds and we all have different gifts. And nothing is more imbalanced than to take one passage of Scripture and say, "See, here? All of you are under obligation to share the gospel the same way, same method, same manner, same means."

That is a careless handling of God's Word.

To that end I will add this application as well. Do not think of yourself more highly than you are. Do not think of yourself more highly than you should.

In Romans 12 when Paul writes that we are to "present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable service,"¹² verse three he exhorts us, do not think more highly of yourself than you should.

I come and I present myself as a sacrifice to God. That means he is going to use me in some great, marvelous way.

¹² Romans 12:1.

Well, great and marvelous by his standards, yes. By yours, probably not. By your standards, it may be mundane and ordinary and boring. But don't you be discontented. Don't be discontent with the service that he has given you, because whatever it is, it is from his hand. And if he says and gives you the ability to tell your friends and your neighbors, he gives you that gift, wonderful. If the manner in which you do it is limited and half hearted and—I say half hearted, half instructed would be a better way of saying it—that is ok.

Earl Blackburn says that one of the most effective evangelists that he knew was a gentleman in the church in Trinity Reformed Baptist out in La Mirada, California and this man never passed out a tract and never once told anybody about Christ's death on the cross. He was one of those—no offense to those of you who are—hyper engineer types. The thick glasses like I would have worn before the age of contacts and stumbling and bumbling and awkward and the pocket protector and.... You know, still uses a slide rule.

No, I will take the poll later as to how many of you know what a slide rule is.

Serious. He said this guy was so awkward it was painful to be around him. And those are Earl's words if I remember them correctly. And Earl is everybody's friend.

And this guy at work all he ever did was say, "Why don't you come to church with me sometime?" And coworkers, seeing the holiness of his life and the humility of his Spirit would come and hear the gospel and come to Christ.

Do not undervalue what God has given you. Whatever it is, don't be discontented. You may not see the results in your lifetime, the result may not be what you want. You may not get the attention and the feel good feelings that you desire. Don't you dare let your exuberance and your zeal lead you to disobedience.

The Word of God gives us the method and the means. Be content. Don't think of yourself more highly than you are.

I want to close with something that in many ways has not anything to do with what I have just talked about, but in some ways is the very crux of it and that is the gospel itself.

These men, the one commanded to go and tell his friends what little he knows, the other one commanded to tell no one, but to go and worship as a witness. These men, nonetheless, serve as great illustrations of the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Think for a moment, if you will, just for a moment about this leper in Mark chapter one. Have you ever seen a picture of someone with advanced leprosy? It is repulsive. It is stomach turning. Open sores, the flesh, the disease as it advances and it is ugly and it is repugnant. And that vivid picture is a picture of the repulsiveness of your sin before God. That is how ugly our sin is.

If your being in the presence of someone with that kind of a disease would turn your stomach, then if I am not being too metaphorical, what does your sin do to the almighty, holy God? And Jesus Christ heals you.

We, as Christians, often—I am sorry. It is the medication I am on. I am blaming that—often have doubts about the willingness of Christ to save us because our sins are so ugly and they are so repulsive. And anybody with a lick of common sense, as we look at it, would look at the ugliness of our sins and turn away. And here comes this leper and all of his repulsiveness and the normal expectation would be that Jesus would turn away. And, instead, he reaches out and he touched him.

Your sins are revolting to God. And you say, “Why in the world would he want to heal me? Why in the world would he want to clean me of my sins?”

Because when you ask, he has compassion. And when you say, “If you will cleanse me, you can cleanse me,” he says, “I am willing,” and he heals you of your sin.

Leprosy or anything of this like is small compared to the ugliness of your rebellion before God. And it is rebellion and it is vile. And if you have ever looked up at God and prayed, “Why would you forgive me?” the answer is because he is a great God and he has great compassion even on the repulsive and the repugnant. And if you are here this morning and you do not see your sin in that light, if you are here this morning and you don’t think your sins are repulsive to God and it doesn’t bother you and your sins are casual, then you need to get the mirror of God’s Word and you need to see yourselves in that mirror, not going away and forgetting what kind of man you are, but to see it and to know that you are ugly and wretched and you need someone to have compassion on you, forgive you for your vile sins.

If you are here this morning without Christ, your sins are just as ugly as anybody else’s and you need a Savior. Come to Jesus Christ. He is willing and he is compassionate. Come to Christ.