

What Is Evangelism?

Evangelism 101

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This evening, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew 28. The last chapter, the last few verses of the first gospel, the gospel of Matthew. If you're with us for the first time or maybe the first time in a long time this evening either here in person or online, I want to welcome you to a season where we are studying a concept, we're studying an idea that we, I guess more often than not, just presume we understand and just assume we know what it means but I think we're discovering quickly maybe not so fast.

We're studying the subject matter of evangelism. Now we've just heard in song the phrase "the story of redemption," the idea that sinful man can be saved by the hands of a sinless God, that we were pulled out of the miry pit of our sin by the sacrifice and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the story of redemption. 2,000 years ago is when the tomb was discovered to be empty which made redemption possible. The very fact that you and I have heard that story today is the evidence of what we know as evangelism. Sharing that story of redemption with those that are around us, generations that follow us, so when we talk about evangelism barring the Lord's return, what we're really studying is how do we ensure, how do we make sure that this story of redemption that is so important to us goes forth to the next generation and if the Lord willing, centuries from now is still being told.

In Matthew 28, beginning in verse 18, one of the most famous passages in all of your New Testament, we call it the Great Commission. As you're going to see in just a moment, it's not the only passage that we could qualify as the Great Commission but this is the recording of the last three verses of Matthew. Verse 18 it says,

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, tonight, Lord, as we walk through, as we study, as we address one of the most common and well-known passages in all of the Bible, Lord, we confess in advance that we have often neglected and relegated this passage to that which we claim to be important but rarely if ever lived out. Lord, as we walk through these concepts, as we study these principles tonight, may these words of Jesus Christ not just be important to us but may they be lived out from this point forward. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight, I want to answer or address a question that may appear very obvious: what is evangelism? When we talk about the sharing of the redemption story, when we talk about telling individuals and people about Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished for them and how they can receive forgiveness of their sins, how they can be saved, how they can know they not only have a relationship with the Lord today but be with him in heaven for all of eternity, we often ask questions such as what is evangelism and we just presume and assume that we know what that means. Well, tonight we're going to take that very simple question and we're going to dissect it throughout not only Matthew 28 but a plethora of other passages to discover what it is that the Lord has called us to do.

I want to begin tonight by observing what it is not. I don't know about you but sometimes I discover best what something is by realizing what it is not. Three things I want you to notice that evangelism is not. First off, evangelism is not being silent. You may have heard the phrase "lifestyle evangelism." Oftentimes people will say, "Well, the way that I live my life communicates to the world around me my relationship with Jesus Christ." You may be a person of great ethic, you may be a person of honesty, you may be an individual who for all intents and purposes lives a very godly life, but even your honesty and your righteousness does not communicate to somebody their sinful condition and their need for a Savior. It may be the lifestyle of a believer but it does not communicate the lostness of humanity and their need for Jesus. So evangelism isn't just having a "holy lifestyle."

The second aspect is it's not statistics, and what I mean by this is there are those who have a tendency to believe that if they can just coerce somebody to say a certain phrase or to repeat a series of phrases after them, then they can have the proverbial notch on the piece of wood that there is a "convert" in their midst. You see, these are opposite extremes. There's one group that says, well, evangelism is just living a godly life and they'll see their need for Jesus in my righteousness, there's another group that says if I can just get them to acknowledge a certain series of statements and "say them back to me," then all will be good. I think one thing we forget is sometimes people repeat what we ask them to just so that we will simply leave their presence.

And third, being "set aside." For those of us tonight who see those first aspects as completely erroneous, I think it is this third one that we oftentimes struggle with. When it comes to sharing the gospel, communicating humanity's need for salvation through Jesus Christ, we tend to think, well, those who are skilled, those who are gifted, those who are educated, those who are "set aside" into some particular ministry, those are the

individuals that the Lord uses. I realize that Ephesians 4 says that he called some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors, some to be teachers, that's verse 11, but verse 12 says, for the perfecting of the saints to do the work of the ministry.

In the book of Revelation 2 written specifically to the church at Ephesus, there is this statement that some people find somewhat unnerving when they read. It says there in verse 6, he says one thing that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I hate as well. That aspect or that group of people known as the Nicolaitans were those who were separating themselves, what we might call the clergy were elevating themselves and they were taking those who were not of the "pastorate," not of the ministry, and they were relegating them to a subservient status within the local congregation. There was this chasm there that the Lord never intended to be present. And I know we hear about that and we say, well, that obviously should never occur, however often when it comes to evangelism, we self-inflict this chasm by stating, "Well, evangelism is to be done by them and by those and not by myself or by us."

That being said, evangelism is not just being silent, it's not just getting somebody to agree with a certain set of precepts and it's not just for a special class of believers. In Matthew 28 Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world." Not just the apostles. Not just the pastors. But all of us. So I want to deal with some of the biblical terms tonight that we have in your New Testament when it comes to evangelism, when it comes to sharing the gospel, and two things I want you to notice. 1. Is how prolific these terms are. 2. How more often than not they are used as a verb, as an action, as a means of going forth.

The word "evangelism" by simple definition means "good news." Thirty-three times in your New Testament it is used as a verb, to do evangelism, the act of evangelism, the proclaiming of the good news of Jesus as that which is done, not just that which is acknowledged. How about the term "evangelist"? Now that obviously would be a position or an individual who does evangelism. It's actually three times in your New Testament in the book of Acts, Ephesians, and 2 Timothy, but it's there in 2 Timothy 4:5 that the Apostle Paul in his last will and testament tells young Timothy on his deathbed literally, he says, "Do the work of an evangelist." Why is that important? Because even though that's not a verb form, he qualifies it that to be an evangelist means to act or to do or to be.

The term "proclamation" or what we might say "to preach," it means "to herald; to speak." Sixty-one times it's used as a verb, eight times it's used as a noun, and when done so it says that we are to proclaim, we are to herald the good news of Jesus Christ, the redemption story. Oftentimes we'll hear statements such as we are to witness, we are to testify. Actually the word that we utilize for witness or testify is the word "martyr," one who bears testimony not just with their words but to the point that they're willing for their very life to be taken from them.

And finally, the phrase of "go make or to become disciples." It's in the imperative which means "to go," most famously found here in Matthew 28 where it says, "Go ye therefore

into all the world." When you look at these terms, not only do we have hundreds of references to either speak and/or do what we know as evangelism, but we discover that it is an action, it is that which flows out of us and from us and not that which is relegated to others who are set aside from us.

So let's talk about the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20, we have the most famous of what we call the Great Commission passages but I just want to walk through the gospels. In fact, the very last chapter of all the four gospels, Jesus gives us kind of those parting words and all of these words are about evangelism. All of them basically he's saying, "That which you have witnessed, that which you have seen, that which you believe, make sure that others hear the story." In Matthew 28 he says, "Go, make disciples." In Mark 16:15 he says, "This gospel should be preached unto all of the world." In Luke 24, it speaks about that his story should be preached. It also says they are to be witnesses. Again, we see a repetition of these words not just within the New Testament but as the last words of Jesus as recorded in the gospels.

Then there's the gospel of John. It's a very unique gospel, if you allow me to use that word, because only 7% of the gospel of John is contained in the other three gospels. None of the other gospels contain the story of Nicodemus, the woman at the well. None of them contain the story of Joseph of Arimathea and the tomb by name. It's unique in that manner but also when it comes to the Great Commission. There is no famous, "Go and make disciples." There is no, "Preach the gospel to all the nations," these great declarative statements, but we do have half a chapter where Jesus is on the side of the sea with the disciples and he pulls Peter aside and he asked him three times, "Do you love me?" Remember he says, "Well, of course I do!" He says, "Then go feed my lambs. If you love me, go feed my sheep. Go and feed my sheep." Again, the gospel of John uniquely gives this perspective of Jesus Christ and it does not have an explicit Great Commission passage but it does have an inferred story that the message of Jesus Christ was not to be left at the sea of Galilee. It was not to remain at the fishing boats. It was to go forth unto all the world.

So when we define evangelism, we know the word means "good news" but I want to give for you my favorite definition that I've ever heard. It comes from D. T. Niles who stated this, that evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food. Now to me that's very illustrative. Why? Because if you've ever been truly hungry and if you've actually been literally starved, then you know the emotions behind that, you know the value of that, and you realize how good the news is to hear where to find food.

Now one such story that took place in my life, in fact, this story took place before Tracy, my wife, and I even knew each other. I was a freshman in college and I had the opportunity through a class that I was taking to do what was called a poverty simulation weekend. If you're not familiar with what that looks like, I'm not surprised because not many people have simulated poverty in their life. But essentially what it means is this, that for 48 hours myself and a group of other students would live on the streets and we would be as the homeless. We would have to find access to our own food. We would have to discover our means of shelter and safety and such. And even though the professor

was watching from a distance to make sure nothing went completely sideways, it was one of the most memorable weekends of all of my life. I now understand why those who find themselves in poverty are so physically exhausted because oftentimes you expend more calories finding the food than the calories actually has in it.

Well, one such time we found ourselves in a predicament. Remember it was a part of a college course and because it was a part of a course, there were certain things that had to get accomplished. It wasn't just 48 hours of survival. Well, one of the things that he had put on the agenda was that we as a group were to go to a certain location and we were to assist some of these kids in kind of a day camp situation, even though it was right before what we would call suppertime. Because the assignments that we had to do had taken longer, we were running behind and we were walking to our destination, we just weren't going to get there on time. He didn't want the kids disappointed so he did something that he wasn't supposed to do even though he's the one that made the rules, he came by and he picked us up in his pickup truck, put us in the back and he said, "I'm not supposed to do this. You're supposed to get there on your own but I don't want to disappoint these kids, so let's go."

He began to drive and over the course of the next few moments, one of the most memorable events in my life ever took place. Here were a group of students who were physically probably for the very first time in our lives truly hungry. We were dirty. We had not bathed. We were exhausted physically and all of a sudden, here we are kind of dozing, I mean, you kind of get in that rhythm in the back of a truck, you know, it's kind of putting you to sleep, you're tired anyway. One of the students had his hand over the side of the back of the pickup and he slapped the side as if to stop, as if, you know, "Stop the truck." Well, we all woke up. The truck stopped. He jumped out of the truck and jumped back in with a loaf of french bread that had been run over at least half a dozen times.

Now tonight if I were to bring you a loaf of french bread that had rubber marks on it, you would probably be kind to me, you would probably say, "Oh, thank you but no thank you," or, "I'm not that hungry." But if you haven't eaten in two days, you don't care. If your stomach is growling to the point where you can audibly hear it, you're exhausted, you don't care if it's been run over. You don't care if it's lying in the street. You just want nourishment. Some of the best bread I've ever had in my life.

Why do I share that story? Because it illustrates this definition, one beggar telling another beggar where to find food, and as we're going to see in just a moment, I think we forget how desperate we were the day we got saved, how desperate we were to have the good news and the hope of Jesus Christ and that which we have known for years and decades just becomes a part of who we are and we forget how hungry people are. Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food.

Now if we can kind of pull out for a moment and see this from the larger perspective. You know, we talk about a body of believers, we talk about a local church, there's a formal phrase that we use, it's called the church growth movement. What that means is

how do churches via the Great Commission, churches through evangelism, how do we grow? How do we share the message? How do we expand what we know as the body of Christ? And though we give it formal titles, as you can see, P1, P2 and P3, I want you to see a very distinguishing mark tonight. What we formally call P1 growth is when we, the body of Christ, are present among the lost world. We're physically around them. We're within them. As an example, I want you to just hypothetically think about maybe we set up a triage tent. Maybe it's a medical situation where screenings are done or dental care is offered. That's a methodology that we use on the mission field abroad as well as close by because we want the lost world to know we care. The problem is just because you give somebody a free health screening does not mean you've shared the gospel. You've been kind to them. You've been loving. You've been caring. You've been neighborly. But you haven't done evangelism. Then we go to what we call P2 which means that we proclaim. We share the fact of the story of redemption, that man was in a sinful state and that Jesus Christ came as the ultimate sacrifice, he shed his blood on the cross and that he rose from the grave three days later. The facts have been presented. The story has been told but evangelism does not take place until what we call P3 when there's actually an invitation to respond to the message. Why is this critical? Because to do good deeds, to offer assistance, even to share the information is not actually doing evangelism. Evangelism by definition is telling the individual where to find the food, not just saying that the food exists or acknowledging that they're in need of nourishment.

You know, when we talk about evangelism, one of the things that we must address is what are our motives? Why would we set up a medical clinic to share the gospel? Why would we go overseas? Why would we go across the street? There's a lot of different motives that a lot of people possess but my favorite description actually comes from the Chinese martyr Watchman Nee. If you're not familiar with Watchman Nee, he died a martyr's death in a Chinese prison in 1972 and for a lot of reasons I could share with you why he's one of my heroes of the faith, many claim that the great house church movement of the Eastern world is a byproduct of his faithfulness and his ministry. But he had probably one of the best visuals or "motivations" for evangelism. It wasn't simply because we have a love for our neighbor. It wasn't simply because we see that there is a need for spiritual nourishment that we have the answer to. But his motive or his description was that the lost and dying world are actually the prisoners of a cosmic warfare, that the enemy has them bound in spiritual chains, he has them behind his lines and that you and I have the privilege of being God's special forces. We are the ones who go behind the enemy lines. We are the ones who penetrate the darkness, and listen to this, bring them home to safety.

The reason I share his illustration is that I think oftentimes our lack of evangelism is because we don't have a good motive. Oftentimes we see a lost world that may live a more affluent life than we do. We have a lost world that may enjoy greater health than we do. But just because they're healthy, just because they're wealthy doesn't change the fact that if they are lost they are imprisoned behind enemy lines. They're not physical but they are spiritual which leads to what I like to call the worldview pyramid. How is it or why are they in this position.

Now what I want to share with you tonight is something that I think can guide us in all areas but particularly when it comes to evangelism. The worldview pyramid is simply a tool to share with you why is it or how is it that a lost world, or even a saved individual, does what they do. By the way, this pyramid applies to every single one of us tonight, everyone who's watching online. Whether you know it or not, you live according to this. Every one of us, every one of us has a belief system. Every one of us believes in something, in fact, even the atheist believe in nothing. They believe in something. Your beliefs, they set the foundation for your convictions, what you deem is important, what you deem as valuable, what you deem is critical to your life. Every conviction that you hold no matter what that conviction is, is a byproduct of the belief that you possess. What you're convicted about will ultimately work out into decisions that you will make in life. Those decisions will ultimately produce a behavior or an outward expression.

So tonight for the sake of illustration, a believer in Jesus Christ, one who has read the words of the Great Commission, one who understands that evangelism is important and is critical. They believe that Jesus saved them. They ought to have the conviction that they are to share that message with other people. If they possess that conviction, then they will share and if they share, it will elicit a response even if it is a resistance to it. Why do I share this worldview pyramid? This doesn't just explain why people do what they do in the world, which it does, but it explains why most believers in Jesus Christ don't actually share the gospel. Our behavior of a lack of sharing, our behavior of a not going is out of the decision to not do so based on the conviction that either A, the need is not as great as we believe it is, or B, maybe the Lord has set aside someone else to do this and it's not for me. A biblical understanding of evangelism states that if we believe that Jesus Christ is our personal Lord and Savior, then by default the Great Commission ought to put within us a conviction that if others do not believe, they are lost in the now and they are lost for eternity, therefore we must render a decision to share the gospel with them irrespective of how they may or may not respond.

Tonight I want to "close" with three perspectives when it comes to evangelism. Evangelism if we're going to talk about what it is, I want to talk about the perspective of God, the perspective of the believer, and the perspective of the unbeliever. So in simplistic illustration, those are the three parties that are represented when it comes to sharing the gospel. Obviously it is the Lord's leading, it is the believer's obedience, and it is the response of the unbeliever.

So let's begin with the perspective of God. Let's talk about the character of God when it comes to evangelism. If we're go go all the way back in Genesis 12 and Genesis 15, we have the initiation of what we call the Abrahamic covenant. We're on the backside of the tower of Babel which came right after what we know as Noah's flood. All types of rebellion and resistance toward God. Well, there in chapter 12 in a remote place known as Ur of the Chaldees, the Lord goes to a man named Abram. He and his wife late in years, without child, takes him outside and says, "Do you believe that your descendants could be more numerous than the stars?" He said, "I believe." He said, "Then get up and go to a land that you know not of." What's important about the calling of Abraham and the character of God is there in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis he said, "Through your

obedience, all nations, all people will have access to what I'm doing. All of humanity will now have the opportunity to be redeemed and restored unto their Creator because of."

Why is that critical? Because the character of God is that he is drawing us to him. God is not hiding from us, God is pursuing us. Think about the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The picture of God in that story is the dad, the man that owns the property that the son has run away from, what's the picture we have? Every day he goes out looking for, desiring for him to come to his senses and to come home. And so when we look at evangelism from God's perspective, it's his character to pursue us and it's his love for us.

Romans 5:8 says, "And while we were yet sinners." Now think about how that verse could end. While we were yet sinners, God left us to our own devices. While we were yet sinners, God said, "I'm going to scrap it and start again." While we were yet sinners, they're not worth it. What does the verse actually say? "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." In that famous John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." When we talk about evangelism, understand that God is pursuing humanity and that in spite of our rebellion, he loves us.

So what about the perspective of the believer, the ones who he has commissioned? I shared this a few weeks ago. God has not given us the great permission, he's given us the great commission. What is our perspective? Well, it boils down to obedience. It boils down to being and doing and speaking as the Lord leads. Now kind of as an aside, I put kind of a series of questions up just for you to ponder tonight. Who was it that inspired Martin Luther to translate the Bible into German? Who was the Sunday school teacher that witnessed to D. L. Moody? Who funded William Carey's mission to India? Who encouraged Paul while in the dungeon to write those famous letters? Who discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls? The list goes on and on and on. For every single person who claims the name of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, there was another who was obedient to share the message.

So from the perspective of the saved, from the perspective of the redeemed, two things to note. 1. Spiritual growth. The Apostle Paul made it clear in 1 Thessalonians, the very first chronological letter that he gave unto us, the church of Jesus Christ. He said, "As I'm doing as the Lord leads me, you be a follower of me." One of the things, if not the thing that will grow us more than anything else, is our sharing the gospel with somebody else. It is often in those times we face our greatest fears, we walk up to the wall of potential rejection and we must share that which we claim so dear to ourselves. It grows us but also what we might call eternal rewards.

Now again, remember the motives that I spoke of earlier, those that are prisoners of the enemy, pulling them back home across enemy lines. But in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, it's talking about those individuals who the Apostle Paul witnessed to and they became believers. He says, "Because of you, one day I will receive a crown of rejoicing." You know, the Bible speaks about five "rewards" for believers. It talks about these crowns and that's a term that's not only used to describe them but also in Revelation 4 and 5 describe

us as casting them before his throne. When you talk about the faithfulness in respective areas of the faith, one of them we often title the evangelist crown based on 1 Thessalonians 2. I think Jesus may have spoken it best, John 4. He's just shared the truth with whom we call the woman at the well. She goes back into town. She brings a whole multitude of men with her that I find just ironic to the story if you know it. She brings these men unto Jesus and basically says, "Guys, you've got to hear what this guy has to say. He knows everything about me." The story begins to flesh out and Jesus makes this famous statement, "He who sows and he who reaps will rejoice together."

So when we talk about the perspective of the believer, you may remember last time we gathered if you were with us, we talked about the fact that in today's world and culture, the number of gospel presentations that on average it takes, it used to be very small, now it's dozens of times before people, at least statistically, respond. As we "sow those seeds," we know not yet those of whom may have received and those whom have believed.

God is calling and he is loving. The believer is obedient and faithful. But let's close with the perspective of the unbeliever. Now tonight, you may be here in person and you actually may be watching online, this may be your perspective, I hope that it's not. But for those of us who are saved, for those of us that are children of God through Jesus Christ, can we go back a few years, can we go back a few decades because oftentimes we forget what it was like to be lost. We forget what it's like to be a beggar. We forget what it's like to be truly hungry.

So what's the perspective of the unbeliever? You know, one thing I think we forget as a believer is the issue of hope or joy. You know, oftentimes we'll hear people today say we live in a hopeless world. It's because statistically there are so many unbelievers in our world. But Jesus said it in John 10:10, he said, "The thief," speaking of the devil, "comes to steal, kill and destroy but I've come to give life that they might have it more abundantly." How many times in the Bible does it speak of the joy that can only come through him? I know you expect me to say this but we've seen it, we've observed it, and at one point we were living it before we got saved. We were searching for hope and joy in anything but Jesus and realize it only comes through Jesus. I think we forget when we see the world acting the way that it does, it's because they're hopeless. They're without joy. And if you've been a believer for decades, sometimes you forget how hopeless you were and how joyless your life was.

Then there's the issue of judgment. You know, Revelation 20 gives a very vivid picture of what we formally call the Great White Throne Judgment. It says there beginning in verse 10, I saw heaven and earth flee before the eyes of the Lord. I saw the dead, small and great, stand before his throne. It says then the books were presented. There was the book of life and then the book of works. And those that were dead, the sea gave up the dead, death and hell gave up their dead, and the dead were judged according to their works. You know, when you look at the position that the lost world is in, it goes back to that motive, they're behind enemy lines.

Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," preaching from Deuteronomy 32, probably illustrated it best when he said that a lost being, one without the hope of Jesus Christ, is simply dangling over the pit of hell by a thread simply waiting for its life to be cut.

What's the problem? The problem is the overwhelming majority of humanity believes that somehow, someday, what they might call heaven or this place of greatness of eternity is based on their works, if somehow the good deeds outweigh the bad deeds, if somehow their altruistic, they're generous, they're not selfish. You know, it's interesting that passage in Revelation, it talks about the book of works are opened. The problem is that God's standard is not your works versus my works or versus somebody else's works, it's versus the work of Christ Jesus which is perfection.

When you look at the people that are present there in Revelation 20, there's two groups. There's the group that are saved. There's the group that are the children of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ. They're with him, if you allow me to say it, on the "good side," and then the other side, the side of condemnation, the side of which Jesus makes this statement that they are to go into the lake of fire and experience what we know as the second death.

One last description: it's permanent. You see, that portion of the Bible ends in chapter 20 of Revelation. Chapter 21 written to the believer says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the former earth has passed away." Eternity as we often describe it, begins in chapter 21 which means that those that are on the enemy's, shall we say, across the lines, those that are a part of everything that he's selling that has no sustenance, they're justifying themselves, they're excusing themselves but unfortunately, unfortunately according to what the Bible says they will spend an eternity in a place that Jesus Christ referred to as the lake of fire.

Tonight I close with a very difficult description. Why is it that we're not more evangelistic? Why is it that we don't share more prolifically? Why is it? It's probably not the best use of words but it's the words I've chosen to use: we're lazy. We're just lazy. We find better things to do, more comfortable things to do, that which is more soothing to our soul, whatever it may be. So tonight as we talk about what evangelism is, I think it best to remember who we were before we were saved, where we were before we were saved, and how we looked at the world before we were saved. You know, I can go back in my own life even though it was 40 years ago, and I remember even as a young child just the pit of lostness when I realized what eternity would look like in my sin and I didn't want a single moment of it, much less eternity. And I'm grateful to share with you tonight that not only growing up in a home but being a part of a church, there were people who told me there was a place to find bread, there was a place to find food and it was through the person of Jesus Christ. Somebody told every one of us about Jesus Christ and it is our privilege to tell others of the same.