

# Redeemer City Campus: Vision Sunday

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”  
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,  
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”  
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

## **Evangelism**

**April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning. Today we’re doing something a little different. We’re taking a short break from our series through the Gospel of Mark and Pastor Paul and I are each preaching sermons specific to our separate campuses. You could say that this is something of a “Vision Sunday” for RCC.

I’m excited about this because it gives us a chance to slow down and have a practical talk about what God is doing here. I would be concerned if we did topical sermons every week because you would then be exposed to my pet topics and passions on an unrelenting basis... It’s good for me to be tethered to various series through books of the Bible and that’s actually my preference but every once and a while I think it’s helpful to do what we’re doing right now.

In one sense, what we’re about to talk about today is not unrelated to what we’ve been studying in Mark. We’ve noticed in these first three chapters that Jesus’ ministry prioritizes preaching. He meets physical needs and he casts out demons, but every step of the way he makes it clear that he came to proclaim the Word. That’s not just my opinion by the way. Jesus said that very thing:

<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” (Mark 1:35-38 ESV)

Jesus says, “This is why I came! I came to preach! I came to proclaim the good news and I went

let anything stand in the way of my mission!” Physical needs matter to Jesus. But physical needs are subservient – they take a back seat – to the proclamation of the gospel.

You and I are called to live like Jesus. We don’t do this perfectly but, as Christians, we ought to be growing to look more and more like him day by day. This means that our priorities ought to realign to look more and more like his priorities. And right at the top of his priority list is the proclamation of the good news – evangelism.

So let me just cut right to the chase. This morning, I want to have a straightforward, street level discussion about evangelism. This is not going to be particularly complex, but I hope and pray that it will be practical and helpful.

In our congregational survey this past year, there was a majority opinion that the one thing we most need to improve on at RCC is local outreach. I agree. So where do we begin? I think we begin right here. Evangelism needs to be more than just something that we do from time to time – it needs to become the heartbeat – a defining characteristic – of who we are as a people.

We issued our two-week challenge about a month ago in which we urged one another to intentionally share the gospel with someone over the next two weeks. On March 26 we set aside some time in the service to hear testimonies of how those conversations went. And something stood out to me: We want to evangelize. We know that we should. But I think that for a lot of us, we have obstacles standing in our way that we don’t know how to tackle and perhaps we don’t have the right fuel in our spirits to carry our zeal from Sunday over into the week.

So, very practically this morning, I want to ask some basic questions. What impedes our evangelism? And what empowers our evangelism?

## **What Impedes Our Evangelism?**

I remember Pastor Jody telling me a story about his runner friend who was very committed. He was training for a marathon so he needed to be disciplined. When Jody asked him how he did it he said something to the effect of, “I identified my excuses and dealt with them. I didn’t have energy to get ready early in the morning so I slept in my gym clothes and put my shoes beside my

bed. I literally just had to roll out of my bed and into my shoes so I stopped hitting the snooze button on my alarm.”

There’s some wisdom there. What are our excuses? What keeps us silent when we should be speaking the truth of the Gospel? The first impediment I want to identify with you is the fear of man.

## **1. Fear of Man**

Some of us are absolutely terrified at the prospect of being challenged on our faith. What if the world asks us the questions that we really don’t want to answer? It’s easy to say to your coworker, “Jesus loves you.” But it is much harder to give an honest answer when they ask you, “Does everyone go to heaven?”

If we’re being honest, we know that there are elements of our faith that our world hates. And there is a very real fear that our neighbors and coworkers will ask those loaded questions, because if they do we will be forced to “out” ourselves. Then everyone will know that we’re the crazy people who believe that everyone who does not put their trust in Jesus Christ is going to hell and who believe barbaric things about sex and marriage and gender. Once that information about you is “out” there is no going back.

We fear man. And for as long as we live in that fear, we will be passive, cowardly, and quiet when we ought to be proclaiming the gospel with boldness. I was encouraged as I read along with the RMM plan to read Ephesians chapter 6. The Apostle Paul – the most fearless, daring and effective missionary that the world has ever seen – made this request:

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,<sup>19</sup> and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,<sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Eph. 6:18b-20 ESV)

Even the greatest missionary in history knew that he needed his brothers and sisters to be praying for him daily so that, when the opportunities arose, he would not shy away from boldly proclaiming the gospel. This is the same Paul who experienced hell on earth in the course of his ministry. We get a little insight into his struggles in his letter to the Corinthians where he tells

them:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (2 Cor. 11:24-27 ESV)

That kind of puts his prayer request into perspective doesn't it? Yet, even in the midst of all of this suffering – in the midst of all of these very real fears – Paul was determined not to shut his mouth like a coward. He was determined to bring the gospel to the world.

So what are you afraid of? Are you afraid that the world will think less of you? They will. Are you afraid that you will lose your job? You might. Are you afraid that people will turn on you and mock you and hate you? Jesus told us this would happen:

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matt. 10:21-22 ESV)

He goes on in verse 26 to say, “So have no fear of them.” Fear of man impedes evangelism. For as long as we indulge in it we will be running this race with burdens strapped to our backs. Have no fear of them.

The second thing that impedes our evangelism is ignorance.

## **2. Ignorance**

How many of us have never shared the gospel because we're afraid that we don't know what to say? Hear me when I say this: If you are truly a believer then you already know what to say. What does it mean to be a Christian? A Christian is someone who repents of their sin and who puts all of their trust in the perfect life, the saving death and the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you are truly a believer than you know the gospel message! Tell the world about the cross of Jesus Christ. Tell them that God has purchased our redemption by the blood of His Son. Tell the world what you put your trust in!

As a personal aside, I think this is one of the worst side effects of the seeker-sensitive model that became so prevalent in churches around the 90's. A subtle belief crept into the church: The paid professionals do the evangelism. The mindset became: If we hire brilliant communicators and awesome musicians and if we invest in fancy lighting and comfy seating than the professionals will evangelize our city! We started to talk about how church is for unbelievers and that, if you are a believer, your job is simply to find a way to bring your unbelieving neighbors to the lightshow with the great music and the dynamic speaker. Suddenly, being an evangelist simply meant inviting people to hear the real, professional evangelist.

That idea hurt the spread of the gospel in North America. I am not the only evangelist at Redeemer City Campus and neither is Paul. We're likely not even the most gifted evangelists. Every single person in this church is capable, called and qualified to share the gospel. None of us should be sitting out the mission.

"But," we object, "there are things we don't know. There are questions that will stump us. We are ignorant of some things that we wish we understood a little better." That is true of you and, honestly, that is true of me! There is a world of information in this book and we're going to spend our lives learning more and more but that doesn't mean that we can't share the gospel today! It just means that we might encounter a question from time to time that we can't answer and we'll be forced to say, "I'll have to look into that a little more." How hard is that?! Don't let THAT stop evangelism! That to me sounds like a great motivation to be a continual learner.

Nowhere in Scripture are we called to leave evangelism to "the experts." Every single one of us knows enough to communicate the basics of our faith. So don't let your ignorance stop you from sharing the gospel.

One last thing that impedes our evangelism is idolatry.

### **3. Idolatry**

This is a broad category but it is no doubt the most insidious and dangerous enemy of evangelism that we face. Nothing will halt the spread of the gospel in this city more effectively than

Christians who are enamoured with and enslaved by lesser loves. That's what idolatry is: Idolatry takes good things – lesser things – and it calls them “God things.” If God is not first and foremost in our hearts and minds then we will NEVER engage in evangelism.

What are the common idols that we face? There are a countless number but two in particular come to my mind as being outright enemies of the spreading of the gospel. The first is comfort.

### **I. The Idol of Comfort**

We need to purge this idol from our hearts on a daily basis. We are some of the wealthiest people that this world has ever seen! Even those of us who are living in the lower economic bracket and who are considered “poor” by Canadian standards are living like kings and queens compared to most people in our world today and most people in our world throughout history. We have a roof over our head, clothes on our backs and food on our table. Some of us could stop working today and we would *still* have money to cover those basic needs for another year! We should thank God for providing for our needs and for putting us in a position to provide for the needs of others.

At the same time, let's not forget that wealth and comfort are deceptively dangerous. It was Jesus who said:

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:24 ESV)

There is nothing inherently evil about money. It IS, however, evil to believe that you don't need God, and that can be easy to do when your bank account is overflowing. It is also evil to become so enamoured with the comforts and the pleasures of this life that you begin to worship them and live for them. The Bible has something to say about people who live that way. Philippians 3:19 says:

Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Phil. 3:19 ESV)

Possibly the greatest preacher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, warned about this kind of living:

“It is because of the selfishness of their hearts, their love of ease and comfort, their desire to look after themselves first and last and always, that they have turned their backs upon God and wandered away from his laws and ‘settled down’ to enjoy life in their own place and in their own way in this present evil world.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the greatest enemies of evangelism that we face is simultaneously something that we identify as a blessing. Money is not evil. It should be received with thanksgiving and used for God’s glory. But people who have money will face a daily temptation to lock themselves away in their big homes with their abundant food and their endless comforts while the world perishes in sin all around them. And if we do not guard our hearts, we will perish with them.

The other idol that particularly stands in the way of evangelism is the idol of the admiration of man.

## **II. The Idol of the Admiration of Man**

Part of our fear of man is not that he will beat us or even kill us – it is that he will stop praising us. Have you ever noticed that it is easy to talk to neighbours and strangers about God’s love and our adoption as sons and daughters into His family, but it is hard to talk about God’s holiness and his wrath against sin? It’s hard to tell the world that Jesus is the only way to the Father. It’s hard because we know our culture. We know what they love, and we want them to see those lovable things in us. We know what they love, and we know what they hate. And we will do everything in our power to keep them from seeing those qualities that they hate in us.

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26 ESV)

If we are going to be committed to preaching the gospel – the **WHOLE** gospel – then we need to smash the idol of the admiration of man down to the ground. If you desire the praises of man then you will **NOT** tell people that their sin eternally separates them from God. If you desire the admiration of the world then you will not tell the world that God is large and in charge and that His way is the only way to live. You cannot serve two masters. You cannot be a people pleaser and an evangelist.

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Old Testament Evangelistic Sermons*. (The Banner of Truth Trust), Edinburgh, 1955. pg 51.

Now, obviously there is more that could be said about the impediments that stop evangelism, but I want to shift to our final question and the most important question of the two. What empowers evangelism?

## **What Empowers Our Evangelism?**

This past year I joined a gym in town, partly so that I could build relationships with unbelievers but mostly because my metabolism has finally received word that I'm not a teenager anymore. Spending time at the gym has helped me to realize that motivation matters. The people who have a goal tend to stick around. The people who are half-heartedly attempting a new years resolution do not.

We all know that we should be sharing the gospel but many of us are never able to bring ourselves to do it. Like a new years resolution, we find ourselves fired up and ready to take on the world after church on Sunday, but when Monday rolls around the fire is gone. I think that happens because we try to fuel ourselves with the wrong things. Guilt, peer pressure, trying to earn God's love, pride... all of these motivations are unhelpful. None of them will provide you lasting fuel. What will you need to face the challenges that will inevitably come your way as you engage with a hostile world?

With the time we have remaining I want to put forward three healthy motivations that must empower our evangelism. The first is perhaps the most foreign to us: The fear of God.

### **1. Fear of God**

The word "fear" bears a negative connotation in our minds, but a healthy fear is actually a great motivator. I have a Greek exam in one week and my professor has a reputation for setting an extremely high bar. I am afraid of sitting down to write that exam and not having the answers for the questions he will ask. That fear is motivating me to study and to study well!

The problem with fear is that we are inclined to fear the wrong thing – or rather, the wrong person. Do you remember that verse we looked at earlier in Matthew where we were warned that



the world was going to hate us because the world hates Jesus? Well Jesus went on to say this in that same chapter:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matt. 10:28 ESV)

You're afraid of the world. Afraid that they will stop singing your praises. That they will mock you. That they will reject you. But you have no business fearing man. The fear of man will stop your mission but the fear of God will breathe life into it.

About a month ago we mentioned this warning found in Ezekiel:

If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. (Eze. 3:18 ESV)

Ezekiel was God's appointed watchman for Israel. Judgement was about to fall on the nation and, as a watchman, it was Ezekiel's responsibility to warn Israel of the incoming disaster. If he failed to warn them then their destruction would be on his hands.

Can you imagine if a satellite photographed an incoming hurricane but didn't bother to warn the people living on the coastline? Wouldn't we file lawsuits against a construction company that was repairing a broken bridge but that failed to put up a warning sign to keep cars from driving to their demise?

Infinitely worse than a flooded coastline is an eternity in hell. Infinitely more perilous than a car driving over a broken bridge is a life lived in open rebellion to our righteous and holy God. We will one day stand before God and we will give an account for all of the times we remained silent.

Do you remember the parable of the talents? Jesus tells a story of three men who were intrusted with coins from their master. Two of the servants invested the money and earned interest and were rewarded by the master for their faithfulness. But one servant hid the talent in the ground and had nothing to show to the master when he returned. The master rebuked the lazy servant and said:

Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 25:30 ESV)

All of our talents and treasures – they haven't been given to us so that we can live in luxury while the world goes to hell. We will stand before the Holy God of the universe and we will give an account for how we used this life He has entrusted to us. A healthy fear of God will fuel evangelism.

Secondly, our evangelism needs to be empowered by a love for mankind.

## **2. Love for Mankind**

This almost goes without saying, but if we really love our neighbours we're going to tell them the gospel. Do you remember the story of the paralytic that we considered a few weeks back? He was lowered through a hole in the roof and Jesus saw his desperate physical condition but Jesus first said to him:

“Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5b ESV)

Jesus understood what this man truly needed. The man thought that his physical condition was the issue but Jesus, acting out of love, dealt with the true problem. Real love – Christian love – recognizes that the greatest gift we can give to our fellow man is to show them their separation from God and to show them the forgiveness that is made available in Christ. Jesus has demonstrated and will continue to demonstrate that truth as we continue our series through the Gospel of Mark. There is a place for meeting the physical needs of the world, but that must serve the purpose of our main objective, namely the proclamation of the gospel.

Why is it easy to give a homeless man some spare change but hard to give a homeless man the gospel? It's hard because he knows that he needs the money but he has no idea that he needs salvation. But if we truly love the homeless man, or the neighbour, or the co-worker then we will refuse to settle for merely meeting the world's felt needs. We'll get right to the root and we'll show them what their real need is because, not only do we want them to be fed, we want them to spend an eternity in heaven with us enjoying and glorifying God.

This brings me to our last motivation. It is third on the list but it is first in importance. If we don't have this motivation then we do not have any motivation at all. Our mission MUST be empowered by a love for God.

### **3. Love for God**

A few weeks ago as I was praying about what I should share for this service I had a lousy day. I woke up to a hole in my car from a hit and run and a ticket on the windshield for parking on the road. My homework wasn't done for the class I had coming up in the evening and I just felt all around discouraged. But I had committed to sharing the gospel at a soup kitchen. So I went, even though every part of me wanted to stay home.

It was a particularly rowdy day and there was a 1 year old there with his daddy who was feeling distraught. I stood up to share about the forgiveness that we can have in Christ and, as I began to preach, the little boy began to scream. He cried for the entire message and every eye in the place was locked on him. There was only one person in the entire room who was listening to me.

That one person was a little old lady who was sitting directly in front of me. She's told me at every opportunity available to her that she doesn't like me. And on this particular discouraging day, as I shared the gospel with a room full of distracted listeners this sweet little lady stared me in the eyes for my entire talk and said, "No-one is listening. You're wasting your time. I hate you. Nobody wants you here."

To be quite honest with you, my love for fellow man was not a strong enough fuel to get through that morning. We are called to love our enemies but I will confess that in that moment I did not love that woman. If my primary motivation for evangelism was a love for mankind I would never go back to that soup kitchen again. I climbed into my car afterwards and my prayer was not, "rescue her from hell," but my prayer was, "You deserve her praise!" God made her, and He sustains her and He provided the meal that she was about to eat after that sermon. He deserves her praise.

I will pray for a spirit of forgiveness and an increased love for her and for the people gathered in that place but there is one primary reason that I will continue to go back to preach the gospel in that soup kitchen and it is this: God is worthy of their praise. And as many times as she might curse me I will remind her of that truth.

Why is so easy for us to tell our friends about our amazing workout routine, our amazing kids, our amazing essential oils, or our amazing favourite sports team and so yet hard for us to tell them about our amazing God? We're all capable of sharing good news and we do! But we so often choose to proclaim the good news about products that will be here today and gone tomorrow rather than the God who came and died on a cross so that we could have eternal life.

My friends, how is it that the Apostle Paul could go on sharing the gospel after being beaten, shipwrecked and imprisoned? Why is it that Peter and John, after watching the crucifixion of their friend and leader could stand before the Sanhedrin and preach the gospel to the very people who were seeking to kill them? We don't have to hypothesize here because the answer is right in the text.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And **they recognized that they had been with Jesus.** (Acts 4:13 ESV)

They had been with Jesus. That. Changed. Everything.

Church, do you know your God? Do you love him? Do you seek him in the morning when you rise out of your bed and do you commune with him in prayer as you go about your day? Do you love to obey him? Do you treasure his word?

If you see him as he truly is then you will love him. If you see him as he truly is, then you will give your life to the task of telling every man, woman, boy and girl in this city that God is holy and loving, powerful and kind, awe-inspiring and wonderful. O that we would believe in our hearts that God is GREAT and GREATLY TO BE PRAISED!

This is our calling. He is our motivation. Let this increasingly become our passion. Let's pray together.

