

Evangelism – The Mission of God

Evangelism 101

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sermonaudio.com

Preached On: Sunday, July 25, 2021

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This evening, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Luke 2. As you're turning to Luke 2 those of you that have been with us the last few weeks may be thinking to yourself, "That's not one of the Great Commission passages. That doesn't sound like one of the evangelistic sections of scripture." Just hang with me for a moment. For those of you that are new to us, on Sunday evenings this season we are addressing the last subject matter that Jesus Christ left us with before his ascension, that we were to go into all the world with the gospel, this concept of proclaiming truth, this idea of what we formally called evangelism and approach it from a variety of perspectives. Luke 2, it may not appear what we consider a Great Commission passage but it's important because it's kind of that centerpiece that takes all that the Old Testament was giving to us and all the New Testament will fulfill.

In verse 8 of chapter 2, we know this is the Christmas story. It says,

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, tonight as we look at the totality of your scripture, Lord, as we look from beginning to end, Lord, help us to realize that your desire, your hope for each and every one of us is that we will be exactly what this passage said, that we will be believers in your Son Jesus Christ. Help us to see tonight not only to be a believer but that for those of us that are, Lord, you have given us a commission, you have given us the privilege of sharing that news with the entirety of the world. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight as we address the subject matter or the concept or the idea of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, what we formally refer to as evangelism, I want to speak to the

idea that evangelism is essentially the mission of God and we do not have the time this evening to cover the entirety of scripture to demonstrate this, but I want to briefly go back into the Old Testament and demonstrate from the very beginning immediately after what we know as the fall of humanity in the garden of Eden the Lord made it very clear, very strategic that the good news of a Messiah one day coming and fulfilled through Jesus Christ was the very first and foremost thing that was communicated. Then I want us to go into the New Testament and look at the evangelistic strategies of Jesus Christ and the evangelistic strategies of whom we know as the Apostle Paul, and I believe tonight we will see that from the very beginning to the very end of scripture, that the proclamation of the truth of the Messiah to come, the Messiah that has come, and the Messiah that one day will return is a thematic thread throughout all scripture.

The Old Testament beginning in the book of Genesis 3, we know it as the famous chapter of the fall of humanity and there in verse 15 we have a passage that we refer to formally as the proto evangelion, which technically means the very first gospel where there when displaying the punishment of the serpent, the Lord says that the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent, saying that one day there will be a Deliverer, one day there will be what we know as a Messiah who will come and rectify and redeem the sinful state that humanity had found itself in for the very first time.

You don't have to go much further through the book of Genesis to find again Lord interjecting this desire to redeem, this desire to save for in Genesis 6 we have one of the most famous stories in all of history, the story of Noah's ark. It's the story where we discuss the, shall we say, the magnitude of the flood, the length of the flood, the depth of the flood, and there's a lot of scientific conversation that comes to be in that but one thing I think we often forgo is to realize that even in the midst of God's judgment, even in the midst of him bringing the repercussions upon humanity's wickedness, what did he do? He preserved those eight souls on the boat to again continue this promise, this desire that he would redeem from the seed of a woman humanity in their sinful state.

By the time we get to chapter 12 and 15 in the book of Genesis, humanity is on the other side of what we know as the Tower of Babel and there's a man by the name of Abram in Ur of the Chaldees. He and his wife great in age, without child, the Lord comes to him without qualification and says, "Do you believe that your descendants even though where you are in the stage of life can be more numerous than the sand of the sea, more numerous than the stars above?" He says, "I believe," and from him we have Isaac and Jacob, the 12 tribes and ultimately whom we know as Jesus Christ.

Numbers 21, there is a passage with the Israelites in the wilderness and as they are wondering if they have fallen sick and in the process of filling sick, the Lord tells them to put a serpent on a stick and if they're looking at the serpent they'll be healed, if they look away they will not be. It seems like an odd story from all different perspectives until you get to one of the most famous passages in all of the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting in life." We know the verse, we know it well. What we often forget is that two verses before that in verse 14 of chapter 3, it says "As Moses lifted the

serpent, so the Son of man must be lifted up." Even in the wilderness, even in the midst of rebellion we have these foreshadowings of the Messiah that is to come.

When we look at the prophets specifically tonight, just the prophet Isaiah, what we call some of the great what I refer to as the Christmas passages, these passages that a virgin shall conceive and in chapter 9, "Unto us a child is born," and all those great passages that we sing during the Christmas season, yet all those passages were proclamations that that which was promised all the way back in Genesis would come to fruition through the person of Jesus Christ.

By the time we get to chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah, we call it the suffering servant passage. It describes that the Messiah will give of himself, that he will allow himself to be beaten, he will give of his blood, he will give of his body, that we, the sheep that have gone astray, can once again be in his fold. Tonight we could spend the entirety of this evening just with the Old Testament passages alluding to and being very specific about the fact that the Lord communicated that redemption and salvation was coming through the person of Jesus Christ. Before, though, we get to how he embodied that, I want to give you some summary statements just about the whole of scripture. When we talk about evangelism, when we talk about the gospel message being proclaimed, I want you to think about just these summary statements that according to Scripture everything begins with and everything ends in God.

When you think about the very first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God." Think about the last verse, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Everything begins and everything ends in God therefore our existence, human existence, should not or should be seen as theocentric and not anthropomorphic. What that means is centered around God not centered around man. And I think we would all confess that humanity since the garden of Eden and particularly today, has been very anthropomorphic. We want to look at our lives through the lens of humanity and the progression of humanity and how we address humanity, but if everything begins with and ends in God, we ought to see everything as centered in who the Lord is. It should be theo or God-centric.

Because of that, all of our individual stories, all of our testimonies, all of our experiences should conform to God's perspective. Not personal agendas. Not personal desires. Not that which is what we'd like to advocate on behalf of ourselves or others. That everything that we are and everything that we proclaim as individuals should conform to God's perspective as the center of our life because he is the beginning and the end of all things. It is this higher affection or this desire for the things of the Lord that will motivate us to live a life for the Lord, and this life that is motivated for the person of the Lord will be a life of worship. You know, worship, at least according to my definition, is our willing response to a self-revealing God, that a life of worship, a life of response not just in corporate singing but a life of responding to the Lord 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, where we find ourselves, compels us to invite the lost to join us.

Now I'm going to push pause there for a moment. We got there real quick. Everything begins and ends in God, our lives should be centered around him and not among human's

agenda and/or desires, our story should conform to his perspective, our higher affection for him produces a life lived for him, our worship a response to him, thus compels us much like it did Abraham and Sarah, to go to a land that they knew not of to invite the lost, to invite those that are wayward to join us in not only dedicating our lives but our, shall we say, our everything to the Lord. Therefore corporate worship not just like this evening but anytime we gather as believers ought to change the culture. Now I want you to think about that for just a moment. Corporate worship ought to change the culture because it is the natural byproduct of all the previous statements.

Now I understand we're here to talk about evangelism tonight, we're here to talk about what it means to proclaim the gospel more effectively and, in a sense, more efficiently, but do you realize that oftentimes that last statement doesn't happen because we come to worship with an anthropomorphic mentality. We come to worship wanting our agendas propagated. We come to worship wanting our preferences promoted. But when everything is centered in God because he's the beginning and the end of all things and we adore him as such, we not only compel others to join us but our worship of him changes us not just during this hour or two but changes us for all of our hours. Now that kind of total approach leads us to the life of Jesus. When we speak about evangelism, we speak about the proclamation of the person of Jesus, the message of Jesus, so let's look at his earthly ministry as a picture of evangelism.

Let's begin with his Incarnation, what we know as his birth. It was evangelistic intent. When you think about Luke 2, the Christmas story, it said that unto all men this child has been born. He has come to deliver us. He has come to redeem us. The angelic host, that's what they proclaimed on the hillside that night before any human being ever met him in the flesh. It was declared by the heavenly host that he came to redeem us. His very Incarnation was evangelistic in its nature.

By the time we come to his ministry in Mark 10:44-45, Jesus makes this profound statement. He says the Son of man has not come to be served but to serve, and listen to this, and to give his life as a ransom for many. When questioned, "Why do you teach what you teach? Why do you do what you do? Why are you saying the things you're saying?" He said, "I'm doing this because you need to know I have come to give my life as a ransom for many."

In John 1, whom we know as John the Baptist probably said it most succinctly. There he is on the side of the river Jordan, he's been baptizing folks, he's chastising those who will not come and bring fruits of repentance. Do you remember that famous statement? "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Again you see this theme all throughout that even in the Christmas story, the Incarnation, it's about redemption, it's about salvation.

In Luke 19, we have a very famous story, it's the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus. We know this as a man who had gone sideways in culture, who climbed up a tree just so that he could see this famous rabbi from Nazareth. Jesus makes the declaration that he will come and eat at his home that evening. There in verse 10, Jesus makes this profound

statement, he says the Son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost. The very Incarnation, God in flesh, is evangelistic in intent.

So let's look at the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and I want to look at this kind of from a step back. We know the stories, we know the parables, we know the miracles, and we know such but I want to look at just through the lens of the proclamation of the gospel. Now I understand that everything that Jesus did was gospel-centric. I get that, but when we talk about you and I sharing the message of Jesus Christ, then we ought to as a Christian, as a Christ-imitator, we should do so as he did. So let's just list some things that Jesus did when it comes to an evangelistic approach or strategy.

1. He had a passion for evangelism. Now I know you would expect me to say that but he was passionate about people, he was passionate about that which he had come to do and to perform. In Matthew 9 also repeated in other places, Jesus makes this statement, that the fields are white for harvest, that his purpose was to come and to redeem, and though the laborers are few, the work is great. You know, Jesus pretty much was the, shall we say, the example of what we call mass evangelism. Now when we speak about evangelism and last week we talked about a definition, it's one beggar telling another beggar where to find food, but sometimes it's one beggar telling thousands of beggars where to find food. And I've heard criticism over time that mass evangelism, that gathering tens of thousands of people in a stadium to share the message, that wasn't how Jesus did it. Then how do you explain the feeding of the 5,000? Now you do realize the Bible says the 5,000 was just the men. It didn't include their wives, their children, or whoever was with them. More likely than not it was probably at least 20-25,000 people and it is the only miracle in the gospels that's accounted for in all four gospels. So Jesus proclaimed that he was the bread of life to thousands of people at one time.

Jesus taught the importance of evangelism. In John 4, there's the famous story of the woman at the well. We often approach it from the fact that here was a woman who had seen her life go a completely different direction than her or anybody had desired. Obviously, Jesus is very pointed but he's very graceful. But when we look at the story, sometimes we forget that there's a part 2 to the story. Remember that she goes into town and when she comes back, there's this fascinating account in the Bible. Now remember what her reputation was, right? You remember what the account in the Bible says? Many of the men came with her. Now I don't really know what to read into that, I just know that she was of such reputation that obviously when she spoke what she spoke about Jesus, a lot of people wanted to hear what she and he, more importantly, had to say.

Remember the disciples questioned Jesus, "Why aren't you hungry? We brought you a to-go box, come on, aren't you hungry?" And he says, "I have meat you know not of." And he began to share with them that he who reaps and he who sows shall rejoice together. He taught them, he teaches us the importance that even moreso than physical food is the sharing of the gospel with those that are lost.

Well, we talked about the large crowds and the lessons thereof but Jesus practiced personal evangelism as well, one-on-one, one beggar telling another beggar where to find

food. John 3, probably my personal favorite story in all of the Bible, at least the New Testament. This is the story of Nicodemus. This is the story of the man who came to Jesus by night. Now when we say personal evangelism, I realize that when Nicodemus comes to Jesus he says, "We know that you have come from God." A man of Nicodemus' stature probably would have had an entourage with him, but at night in that setting it would have been intimate, it would have been small. So Jesus demonstrated it wasn't just large crowds at one time, it was also on rooftops at night in very personal settings.

When it came to evangelism, Jesus was very intentional. Now one of the things that I put on here was he went to Samaria. Now why is that important? Because everybody tried to avoid Samaria. Everybody tried to go around Samaria and somehow make an excuse to not have to go through there. He actually purposefully went there to encounter people with the truth of the gospel.

As I mentioned with Zacchaeus, Jesus was very conversational. If you look at the story of him and Zacchaeus, it's just a dialog. "Zacchaeus, I want to come to your house tonight." And he goes to his house and there is no preaching, there is no teaching, it's just the two of them having a private conversation in the midst of a semi-public encounter.

That being said, I think we would all agree that Jesus was very respectful when he shared the gospel. Remember the story of the woman who was caught in adultery? It ought to be renamed the couple that was caught in adultery, but nonetheless it's the woman who was laid at Jesus' feet and there is a woman who according to the law should have been stoned, should have been left for dead, but not only did he send those accusers away but you get the idea that here is this woman that had experienced enough shame in her life that he was respectful, he was kind, he was gentle to her.

That being said, he was also very directional. Every person that Jesus Christ encountered whether it was Zacchaeus who was stealing money, a woman whose life had gone sideways, Nicodemus who had questions unending, every conversation had a direction from the trivial to the eternal. And one of the great debates that we have theologically is where is this line about being, you know, shall we say, in the world but not of the world, and one of the things that we discover about Jesus, because I've heard people's excuse, "Well, Jesus hung around these kind of people and those kind of people so I'm gonna hang around them too." Yeah, but the difference is that Jesus did not leave them where they were. Jesus took them from the trivialness of their sinful condition to the importance of their need for eternal salvation.

Now obviously Jesus was directional, he was respectful, but I think we'd all agree he was a little confrontational. Matthew 23 and Jesus is there in conversation with whom we call the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes, he makes very interesting statements such as that, "You are white-washed tombs. You're beautiful on the outside but you're corrupt on the inside. Those individuals that you have following you, those young interns, those desiring to be who you are one day, they're twice the children of hell as you." I think we can agree it was pretty confrontational but the people that Jesus was most confrontational with were those who were the most antagonistic and self-propagating that

he encountered. He was gentle and he was respectful to the woman that was thrown at his feet, she had been shamed enough, he was confrontational with those who knew no shame though they needed some in their life.

Jesus was, in an essence, missional. Whether it's the woman at the well or many other passages, everywhere he went he was the embodiment, he was the fulfillment of what the Lord declared in Genesis 3, "Behold, from the woman will come a seed." Redemption. Salvation. Forgiveness of sins.

Think about the attitude of Jesus. It didn't matter if somebody's life was broken, whether they were religious or whether they were curious, Jesus took them where they were and directed them to why he was there. There were those that were confrontational with him, there were those that were shameful of him, there were those that said, "Just speak the word, I'm a man over many, just speak it and it will happen, God," and there were those that the Bible says they tried to trap him in his words. He met each and every one of them with this distinct purpose: how can you who have sinned and gone contrary to the Lord's way, how can you know that God loves you and desires to redeem you? I'm going to the cross. I'm going to raise from the dead so that you can be saved no matter what your background is, whether your life is broken, whether you're religious, whether you're wealthy, whether you're poor, whatever it may be. Which is why we have the passages we read last week, what we know as the Great Commission passages, that we're to go into all the world.

You see, Jesus demonstrated for us. He did not go to just one socioeconomic background. He did not go to just one specific group. He did not go to just one type of people. He met those that were Jewish, those that were Gentile, those that were Samaritans, those that had large entourages, and those that were completely isolated. So when he made the Great Commission of, "Go into all the world to share the gospel with all," it's not just his words but we see it demonstrated even in the brevity of the gospels that we have.

Let's fast forward to the Apostle Paul. I think we would agree of all the personalities in the totality of scripture to demonstrate what we know as evangelism as the mission of God, he is probably the one we can look to the most succinctly tonight. The thing about Paul that I want you to hear initially is this, that his life was a prepared witness. And here's what I mean by that, that just his biography is a demonstration of what our witness should be. Allow me to illustrate. It was very clear in scripture that there was a life lived contrary to God prior to his conversion. He was lost and even though he excused his lostness, he never backed down from it when he shared his testimony. He made it very clear whether he was in front of a Roman governor or whether he was in front of a synagogue audience that his life prior to his conversion, he was lost, he was in rebellion and he lived a life of shame. He was clear, "I was lost." But he was also a prepared witness by his conversion. You notice that when he shares his story, it's always the same story. He never changes it, that his life took a complete 180 degree turn when he met Jesus. Not when he got religious, not when he got concerned about other people, when he met Jesus everything changed. And then by his commission. From Acts 9 when he's lowered in a basket to Acts 13 when he goes on his first missionary journey, he made it

very clear that he had been commissioned, he had been sent by God to speak the message of the change in his life that took him from lost to found and darkness to life.

This is critical because if we're going to share what Jesus Christ has and does do in our lives, then the story we tell has to bear witness in our own story, that we are lost, who are found only through Jesus Christ, and because we are saved by him, we are commissioned to share that information with other people. You didn't realize that your life was pretty similar to the Apostle Paul's. His evangelism was not only prepared in his life story but it was intentional, much like what we saw in the life of Jesus. I want to share just some aspects of his sharing the gospel, very personal, very personal. In fact, story after story after story you see the Apostle Paul sitting down with individuals, sharing his story, sharing the truth of the gospel message. Whether it's his first missionary journey, his second missionary journey, whether it's him in prison with Barnabas sharing with the Roman jailer or somewhere in between, a man who had the reputation for essentially being the voice of Christianity did not think himself too highly that he was not willing to entertain a personal conversation with someone whose identity is not even given to us by name in the Bible.

You know, there's an old adage about pastors and, by the way, this could go into the business world, the sports world, every world. One of the things that we communicate a lot about pastors is if you think you're too big for a small church, then you're too small for a big church. The Apostle Paul never thought of himself so highly that he wasn't willing to share the gospel even with a random stranger whose identity was not known by the masses. Yet at the same time, he held a lot of public large gatherings. In fact, in his life throughout the book of Acts and through what we know as the letters of the Apostle Paul, there are nine public messages of redemption or salvation that he is known to have preached, some of them to several thousands and such. Not only was he known for private conversations but nine times the Bible talks about large public gatherings that he proclaimed the truth of Jesus Christ and yet at the same time, he shared the gospel in homes. Lydia in Thessalonica just as a simple case study. So whether it was in prison, whether it was in homes, or whether it was in a large tent that maybe he himself had made, he shared the gospel everywhere he went.

He was apologetic and when I use the word apologetic, not that he was apologizing for it, it means he made a defense for. In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul was with the philosophers of his day, the stoics, those who had brilliant educations and had rhetorical skills where they were able to communicate so well, and yet he was not fearful to get in the mix of all of it. He was there defending the faith, even saying, "You even worship an unknown god. I know the name of the one that you know not of." He was willing to go into the academic circles of apologetics.

Because he was an apostle, he had a unique ministry even of miracles. In Acts 19, there's a unique story about a napkin or a handkerchief that was the Apostle Paul's that brought the message ultimately of redemption to humanity. Why is this important? Because I think when it comes to sharing the gospel, we often get in this trap that there's one way to do it, there's one means, there's one method and that's what God has blessed. Well, we see

that Jesus Christ utilized multiple methods, the Apostle Paul utilized multiple methods. But tonight, you and I live in the 21st century particularly in this community and many others at least in our culture, you know that we live in a very wealthy educated community comparative to the world, and so I want to close tonight with a very interesting perspective of evangelism via the life of the Apostle Paul per the last chapter of his life. 2 Timothy 4. I mean, his last will and testament to what we know as the church of Jesus Christ, specifically to Timothy, I want you to notice some things that he speaks of that ought to speak to us as well.

1. He alludes to the fact of his previous writings and I put on the outline the 12 books of the New Testament. Now I understand there is an academic debate if it's 12 books or 13 books, we'll just say at least a dozen, it may be a baker's dozen, so to speak. But he alludes to the fact that the Lord gave him information that was to be shared even past his death. Can I give each and every one of us a challenge tonight? As a believer in Jesus Christ barring his return, there will be a day where we breathe our last breath. It's going to happen. Can I ask a question? Have you made plans for the Jesus that you claim to believe in and love for the message of what he did and how he changed your life, to go forth even after you're dead?

You know, some years ago one of the mentors of my life, a man that I held in such high regard, we were at a conference together and he began to weep. I said, "Sir, why are you so upset?" He said, "Jeff, all that the Lord has given me is going to die with me. I never wrote it down." And he challenged me, a young man barely 30 years of age, write it down. Now you might not have the privilege of "writing a book," write it down. Write down for those who come behind you, write down for those who come years afterwards. Our salvation experience with Jesus Christ should not end with the amen at our funeral. The Lord gave us his inspired words through the Apostle Paul but thousands of years later they still communicate the truth of the gospel. You know, some of the great devotional books that we have access today are given by those who have been dead for at least 100 years or more yet the gospel is still being promoted.

He gave us an example that the gospel message, our evangelistic strategy should go beyond our death. Second, he was into church planning. It didn't matter if it was Thessalonica, it didn't matter if it was Ephesus, it didn't matter where it was, the Apostle Paul believed that the local church was vital to evangelistic strategy, that the local body of believers, that wherever they gather whether it be in this locale or other locations, that that was the main means. Think about the letters the Apostle Paul wrote, "To the church at." It was always a group of believers in a specific location and so when we speak about evangelism, oftentimes there are ministries which are great, there are methodologies that "outside" these particular walls, but it always should be centered in the local church.

Another aspect that we often don't think about is that the majority of the Apostle Paul's ministry was an urban ministry. Now I'm sure there were days he found himself out in the middle of nowhere but the majority of his ministry is that he would go into the center of a town, whether it be small or large, he would minister unto those, and today we live in a culture, at least in the United States, where if you look at the projections over the next 1-2

decades, that over 90% of our population will live in 40 respective areas, 90% in 40. Now I'm not against what I might call rural evangelism, there's a place for each and every aspect, but I think it's interesting that the Apostle Paul focused on areas of high concentrations of individuals.

Last but not least, when the Apostle Paul ends his life, not literally ends his life, when his life comes to an end in 2 Timothy 4, there's a list of names at the end. I've always found it interesting the names that he lists and why he lists them but if you look at the ones listed in 2 Timothy 4, he's doing follow-up, people whose lives that he's kind of cross-threaded with, people who he shared the gospel with, people who are vital to the ministries of these local churches that he served in, literally on his deathbed he wanted to make sure that that which he invested in other people continued even past his dying breath.

When we look at the totality of scripture whether it be the stories in Genesis or the last paragraph of the Apostle Paul, I think we can conclude tonight that there is a very emphatic thread. Thousands of years prior to the Incarnation and now thousands of years after the resurrection, the Lord has intended each and every one of us to communicate in this life and even past our lives the message that salvation comes through the person of Jesus Christ alone. What we know as evangelism is, was, and will be until he returns the mission of God. Dare we not get distracted on any other mission.