

Evangelism 101

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Tonight, our worship service has made for a perfect transition for our study, in fact, I'm going to encourage you if you have a Bible tonight to open to the book of Colossians 3 as we continue our study regarding a subject matter known as evangelism. If you don't mind me sharing kind of a little bit of the method behind the madness, some of you may have heard for the very first time this morning that on Sunday night, October 31, we are hosting, we are planning a large community evangelistic outreach ministry. It is our hope and desire to have as many people as possible here in our community on our campus and the surrounding areas. There's going to be a lot of items there. There will be some fun things, some food and such, but as we're going to discuss tonight, there's one single solitary purpose why we're doing all that, is we want to create an environment where people who would not normally come to church will come to hear the message of Jesus Christ very simply and clearly explained to them.

Tonight, as we turn to Colossians 3, verse 16 and 17 states this,

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, tonight, Lord, as we focus on this passage about doing all that we have unto you, specifically when it comes to how we worship, how we voice not only what we believe concerning you but our trust in you, help us tonight to allow all of the preferences, all of the opinions and all of that to just fall by the wayside. Lord, may we see what your word clearly communicates and may it deeply impact us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This evening as we gather, we continue our study of evangelism which by simple definition is how do we proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ to a lost and a dying world. We began our study by showing the dire straits that we are as a culture, of how

few people in our culture are truly believers in Jesus Christ and how the gospel message via evangelism has begun to wane over the years. We spent several weeks studying not only the need but the means of personal evangelism, and over the last couple of gatherings, we've transitioned to more how do we corporately evangelize. Yes, evangelism by definition is one beggar telling another beggar where to find food but how do we collectively create environments, create opportunities where we work collectively together as the body of Christ to reach the lost world with the gospel.

Tonight's subject matter may seem odd at first but I promise it's going to come together. It's entitled "Worship and Evangelism." How does our worship, how does it impact evangelism, and how should evangelism be an extension of our worship. Now for the sake of definition, allow me to define worship. Now this is not the dictionary definition of worship, this is mine. It simply goes as this: our willing response to God's self-revelation. That's why in Colossians 3:17 it says we do everything as unto the Lord. However God is working and however he is revealing, our worship to him is to willingly respond to how he's revealed himself.

Typically when we hear the term worship, we think exclusively in the realm of music but worship is not exclusive to music because it says do everything as unto the Lord and not everything we do involves what we know as music. But here is a history of how music and evangelism have been necessarily partnered throughout the last 500+ years. Very brief tonight, I want to give you a historical sketch on how our corporate worship, how our music ministry as the body of Christ has impacted, affected, and been a part of our evangelistic thrust.

The word I've utilized tonight is the word pietism. It's not a word that I expect you necessarily to have heard of before but pietism is the pre-Protestant Reformation. In other words, we know October 31, 1517 very well, we know that's the date when Martin Luther placed those 95 famous these on the church of Wittenberg's door but there was a movement of God in that area that preceded it. It was for lack of better terms, it was the prelude to what we know as the Protestant Reformation. It was called pietism, a return to personal piety, a return to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ not just a corporate religious expression. One of the things that we so unique about the pietists is they returned to something that had been absent for centuries, they returned to singing, they returned to expressing their faith in song, because as you've heard me say before, Christianity, biblical Christianity is the only faith in the world that expresses itself through song, something that is worth singing about, something worth playing about. It is something that God has birthed in us that even if we're not good at singing, there are times it just comes out of us. Even before what we know as the Protestant Reformation, there was a thrust of a renewal to a personal piety that involved corporate musical worship.

Now 500 years of time is represented by a single dash, and on the other end it's a phrase that we've adopted in our culture, some people call it CCM, it's contemporary Christian music. I find it humorous that that's a title we gave it in the 1970s and we're still utilizing the term contemporary, but nonetheless, allow me to very simply and very briefly tonight

share with you an amazing correlation between public worship in the Christian community and evangelism. What you may or may not be aware of is simply this, that you and I today do not worship typically in the manner that the pietists did. We do not worship typically in the manner that the early Reformers did, or even those during the first Great Awakening, the second Great Awakening, and so on and so forth. Over the course of the last 500+ years, the Christian community as far as our worship style and our worship presentation has changed, altered and turned many a times but here's the thing I want you to hear, this is an amazing fact, that all throughout time, that change in style – hear me clearly – was not because we wanted it to sound different. It's not because we wanted somehow to express ourselves with a uniqueness of sound. Every one of those stylistic changes, and I could walk through 500 years of history and put every one of you to sleep tonight so I will spare you, every one of those stylistic changes – listen – came on the backside of a major evangelistic awakening or revival. In other words, when God swept through this land during the first Great Awakening, on the backside of that came what you and I know as the gospel song. In other words, all these stylistic changes were actually on the backside of an evangelistic fervor.

So how does our public worship and our evangelistic thrust, how do they come together is typically throughout time when we see enormous numbers of people come to faith in Jesus Christ, we do exactly what Revelation 5:9 says, we sing a new song. What's interesting is in this last half-century, what you and I know as the contemporary Christian music genre is actually a byproduct of what we know as the Jesus Movement. It was not a worldwide revival movement, it was not even a "North American wide revival movement," it was one that was selective among college students and to be quite honest with you, the hippie generation of the '60s and the '70s which explains that unlike other genres of change, why it was not as widely adopted because it did not follow a major spiritual awakening or a global revival movement. But what I want to share with you in brief is simply this, that when we look at styles and we look at genres of music, that throughout history, at least in the last 500 years, those major stylistic changes have always come as a result of a major evangelistic thrust within the culture or within the world in which it happened.

So what are the implications of today, how we worship? What are the implications for evangelism? A couple of things to share with you. Some of these will be obvious and some not so much.

1. Anytime we gather to worship as the body of Christ, anytime we sing a song, anytime we express ourselves, there must be a solid theological base. You and I do not have the privilege just to sing what we want to sing. We must sing, like we read in Colossians 3, the psalms, the hymns, the spiritual songs which are rooted in a solid biblical theological foundation. One thing I do want to share with you and this may be surprising, is there is actually a difference between what we call an evangelistic service and a worship service. An evangelistic service strategically is a corporate setting with the purpose of reaching the lost. A worship service generally speaking is a gathering of believers to honor the Lord that they believe in.

Some years ago, I had the opportunity to discuss this difference in detail and it was one of the most rewarding yet uncomfortable moments of my entire life. Through a series of conversations, I found myself having gotten an interview with Cliff Barrows. If you're not familiar who Cliff Barrows is, he is the choral and the worship leader, was for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for many many decades. And I'm a big believer that when you go into an interview, you need to have all the information and those of you that don't know me well, I kind of have a little joke, you're going to find 100 guys who can out-preach me, 100 guys who can out-teach me, but there is nobody who is going to out-research me. I'm going to find up and dig it all up. Well, I had actually gone back through the Billy Graham...yes, I did what I'm about to tell you. I went back to all of the Billy Graham Evangelistic services that they had had for over 40 years, all the way back to the famous Los Angeles Crusade, went all the way back and I began to categorize all of the songs that had been sung. I categorized them based on their subject matter, whether it was a song about the cross, whether it was a song about our relationship with the Lord, whether it was a song about spiritual warfare, the Second Coming, general basic subject matters. And I discovered a very interesting trend, that over the course of time, that what we know as the music that was sung at these Billy Graham Crusades had somewhat, and forgive me for using the word, it kind of evolved from becoming purely evangelistic reaching the lost to becoming more of a worship service for the saved. At the same time, I had the statistics for the number of people that came to faith during one of the Graham Crusades, and as you can imagine, the number of decisions had waned over time as well.

And as a young researcher, I thought it was a benign question. It turned out not to be. I asked Mr. Barrows, I said, "Could there be any correlation with the fact that over the last four decades the music has become more worship rather than evangelistic and the decisions have waned in the process?" I did not know he was not going to receive it very well. He was not very pleased with me. He shared with me his great displeasure with the question that I had asked and the data that I had presented, and for lack of better terms, he put me in my place. He left. I stayed and began to ponder what my new career would now be.

We were at a major conference, one of which thousands of people had attended for multiple days, and I had an event take place about two days later that it was either going to become the greatest or the worst moment of my life. I didn't know which one. I want you to imagine you're at a Billy Graham training facility, thousands of people, and on the screen it says, "Jeff Meyers, please report to a certain location. Cliff Barrows wants to speak with you." I'm like, "Okay, I guess I'm about to take Round 2." I went to the specific location very humble. Let me share with you what occurred. That man who is legendary when it comes to worship and evangelistic music wrapped his arms around me, bear-hugged me and said, "Young man, I want to apologize to you." I said, "Sir, what are you apologizing to me for? I'm the one that upset you." He said, "No, son, the reason you upset me is because you revealed what I knew was to be true." He said, "We used to sing nothing but come to the cross and now we've started into we've made the Crusades more like a Sunday worship service rather than an evangelistic crusade."

Now the reason I share that with you tonight is that because typically when we gather, it is a worship service, but there are times where we strategically are there to reach the lost and our worship at that time is not for our edification but for a witness to those that we've intended to reach. In doing so, we need to be careful to resist what I call false dichotomies. Here's the easiest way of explaining that, is that every one of us has a preference, every one of us has a prejudice toward what we like, what we enjoy, what we prefer, and sometimes the most evangelistic songs may not be the style of your preference, and sometimes the most worshipful songs may not be the genre of your preference. So if we have a theological base and we know why we're singing it, then the genre or the style doesn't just take second place, it actually takes third place to the reason for gathering which means that you and I should understand there is a difference between personal preference and biblical truth.

Let me share with you one of the frightening things that I'm seeing in our world today. I understand this is from the perspective of a pastor and of a theologian, so to speak. If you were to go back to some of the great songs of our faith, notice I didn't designate a style, just songs of our faith, some of the richest most theological songs, the words were penned by the pastors and then the musicians came along and put it to music. We've now become a world where the musicians are writing the lyrics as well as the melody. I'm not stating that musicians cannot be very theologically astute, however I think one of the great struggles is we're creating communication of our personal word usage or our personal preference of phraseology rather than, "Thus saith the Lord."

So how does our corporate worship and evangelism, how do those two come together? There is an individual by the name of Morgenthaler who wrote a book entitled "Worship Evangelism." It makes perfect sense, right? The thesis of that book is that when we worship there should be an audience of one. In other words, it's not your neighbor, it's not the person sitting in front of you, behind you, not even the person that you saw come in the back door, that anytime we worship whether it is an evangelistic service and/or a worship service, there should be one person that we are concerned what they think and that's God and God alone. The fact that we are talking about evangelism, it might surprise you that when it comes to the body of Christ gathering together, that our worship should take primary place and evangelism should take secondary place.

Some of you are familiar with Lee Strobel. Lee Strobel decades ago was an atheist. He was a denier of God. He was a denier of scripture. He was a journalist. He went on a search for what was truth and as you chronicle his search for truth, one of the things that was so mesmerizing to him is that he went to worship services with his wife and he saw them worship and he heard them worship, he saw the authenticity, he saw the genuineness, he saw their passion, and observing their worship actually began to tenderize his heart to the gospel. And so again, that false dichotomy of it's either got to be completely evangelistic, completely worship, understand that even when it is worship it can have an evangelistic impact.

We should never sacrifice the authenticity of the gospel for cultural relevance. Just because the world says it one way doesn't mean that's how the Bible expresses it. Just

because the world communicates with certain phraseology does not mean that it is theologically or biblically astute. In essence, every word that comes out of our mouth, every note that is played, every expression of our faith corporately should put Jesus Christ before you and others. Remember, there is an audience of one and we must make a commitment to receive truth in light of your personal past. What does that mean? I know of an individual today that for the sake of name dropping or lack thereof I will not name, but he has a disdain for anything that would speak of music that we might call traditional. Just a disdain for it. Why? He grew up in a small rural church in an environment that he did not have pleasure in, and so it's almost as if he is on a mission to do everything he knows to do to somehow discredit how he was raised. There are people that are on the opposite side of that spectrum as well, and one of the biggest struggles that we have is the fact that every one of us has personal preferences, every one of us has a past, and our goal should be to put Jesus Christ first above ourselves and others and our preferences fall far down the list. As I've shared before in major evangelistic crusades, that the gospel message was primary irrespectively of the genre that may have been sung prior to the message.

Speaking of corporate worship, what about what we know as mass evangelism? This is one of those strange titles that we need to discuss today, it's the idea of us sharing the gospel in a large crowd-like setting. Remember, I know evangelism is one person sharing with another person the gospel of Jesus Christ but what about mass evangelism, what we call crusade evangelism, tent evangelism, whatever it may be? Let me give you somewhat of a historical sketch in our particular environment. You and I are the spiritual benefactors to a history of awakenings and revival movements. If we go back to the first Great Awakening, if we go back to the 1700s, we will discover that some of the most famous names that are associated with the faith actually were massive promoters of what we call mass evangelism or gathering large crowds for the purpose of sharing the gospel. John Wesley, who we know famously instituted what we know today as the Methodist church. Jonathan Edwards, the preacher of the sermon "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," former President of Princeton University and a large promoter of mass evangelism. Charles Finney preached so much in northern New York they called the area the burned out district. And how do we dismiss Dwight L. Moody? These are names that are just the Hall of Fame of modern-day evangelical Christianity. If we were to ever create a room with stained glass windows to those to pay honor to, these guys would be on there and every single one of them not only participated in but promoted hosting large community-wide evangelistic events where in some cases particularly in Jonathan Edwards and I could have put George Whitefield's name as well, some 30,000 people would gather without microphones and amplifications, they would just simply use the vocal cords and structures that the Lord gave them.

So why should we, why should we participate in mass evangelism? Why should we promote it? Why should it be something we do in addition to our weekly worship services? Why should it be something that we would strive to do? 1. You expect this from me, it's biblical. You say, "Well, how do you know it's biblical?" I don't know how you define mass evangelism but in Acts 2 when it says 3,000 people gathered, that's a pretty large number. When Jesus Christ multiplied the food, that great miracle, it says

there were 5,000 men. If you include all the wives, the children etc., it would have been easily over 10-15,000 people. And nine times in the New Testament whom we know as the Apostle Paul preached to large massive audiences. So when we talk about mass evangelism, when we talk about evangelistic events, it's not just a modern phenomena, it's not just a product of Western civilization, it is actually a biblical concept.

2. One of the advantages of utilizing a mass evangelism event is it reminds believers that there are lost people. You know, statistically speaking, once a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, that within three years they no longer have any lost friends and sometimes we need a regular reminder that this world is full of lost people, we just may not interact with them on a regular daily basis.

Last but not least, it still works. When we gather large groups of people together and we share the gospel with them, we see response. It still works.

So when we speak of mass evangelism, what we might call evangelistic preaching, so when we gather on a typical Sunday morning we know that statistically hopefully the majority of the people are already believers. It's a worship service. But when we gather in an evangelistic gathering, it is our hope that we have a large number of lost people that are there to hear the gospel. So if they're there to hear the gospel, they must be given an opportunity to respond to the gospel. We call that an invitation and you may or may not be aware of this but what we know as the gospel invitation is actually under great scrutiny today. There are people in our world today that question whether we should, for lack of better terms, cast the net out and ask people to render a decision for Jesus Christ. Why would we do so? Why would we ask someone to respond in the affirmative? Well, shocking again, it's biblical. Remember those 3,000 people in Acts 2? How did we know they got saved? Because at some point they had to respond. How do we know two chapters later that 5,000 people got saved? Because at some point they had to respond. When it says that they followed in baptism, there had to be a point where those who rendered a decision were identified by those that were preaching so they would know who they were.

So when we speak about an invitation, the gospel goes forth, the lost respond, repent and are saved, and we give them the opportunity not only to identify with Christ but now to identify with the body of Christ. But there's also some pretty historical evidence. Tonight, you are seated in a Baptist church and if you were to look at our spiritual heritage, way down the line toward the beginning of the Protestant Reformation there were a group of people known as the Anabaptists. Now some people might not be but I'm somewhat proud that our spiritual heritage is not the magisterial reformation, it's the radical reformation. That's right, you know the word Anabaptist means to be baptized again. That's what it means. In those days, you typically had people that had grown up in an environment where they had practiced pedo or infant baptism as a child, and then as an adult, they had come to a conscious understanding of their sin condition, they had called upon Jesus to save them, and like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, they wanted to profess that faith and so when they were baptized as an adult – listen – they were rebaptized which is what Anabaptist means.

Well, how are you going to baptize somebody as an adult if you have not invited them to respond to the gospel? Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, some of the greatest preachers of what we know as the first Great Awakening, they did not hold, you know, walk down the aisle, come to the altar style evangelistic invitations but every one of them promoted at the end of the message the opportunity to meet either with them or somebody else privately about the decision they needed to render.

Then one of my favorites, the Anxious Bench. This isn't something you see practiced much anymore but it was during the 1800s, that in a typically Protestant church environment, it kind of looked Catholic, so to speak, they would have benches kind of like the Catholic churches have prayer benches up front. They would have them and what they called them was the Anxious Bench and this was a phenomena of that era is that if you were seated in the service, at any time during the service, at any time if you became convicted of your sin and your need to be saved, you would get up and go and kneel on the bench and then one of the counselors would come to you and then you would go and discuss your relationship with the Lord.

And my personal favorite, one that's even utilized, yes, here at First Baptist, Opelika, is the Inquirer's Room. Yes, I'm a fan of multiple nets to catch fish but the beauty of the Inquirer's Room was actually D. L. Moody. D. L. Moody would share the gospel thousands and thousands of people and, yes, there would be those that respond but they had a room set aside and said as soon as the service is over, if you want to talk, if you want to be prayed with, if you want to discuss your relationship with the Lord, we'll have people standing by. We would love to spend the time that is necessary for you.

So tonight as we discuss the "gospel invitation," you can see that there is multiple facets to a public profession that has been used not only since biblical days but even in what we might call modern days according to time. So conducting an evangelistic event, the opportunity to gather as the body of believers to reach a community with the gospel, why is it that we don't see more of them? Why is it that we don't see more believers putting their resources and their time and their energy into doing large evangelistic events? I've already told you why, because it takes resources, time and energy. To be quite honest with you, it is incredibly exhausting and somewhat expensive to host an evangelistic event and oftentimes we become so concerned about our own self-being is we're not willing to put our time into those who have yet to respond to the gospel.

Then what I call innovative events. This is utilizing a variety of means, whatever it may be, to share the gospel with somebody else whether that's athletes who meet with teams before the games, or whether there are those that give musical lessons to students who just want to perfect their trade for the purpose of sharing the gospel. Sometimes it takes place in a mass environment and sometimes in a private but what you've noticed tonight is that our worship impacts not only evangelism within this room but how we approach evangelism outside this room and Jesus Christ at the end of all the gospels said go into all the world. So if you and I are worshipping theologically, it should cause to go into all the world and be evangelistic.

Let's pray with our heads and our eyes closed. Maybe tonight as we share the need for biblical worship and evangelism, maybe you're that person saying, "I need to respond to the gospel." The Bible makes it very clear time and time again whoever calls on the name of the Lord would be saved and maybe you're that person tonight who needs just to call on the Lord, maybe you're that person who needs to cry out to the Lord that you are a sinner in need of saving. In just a few moments after I pray with us and for us, maybe you're that person who needs to step out and step forward. Tonight would be a great night to call on the name of the Lord. Or maybe you've already called on the name of the Lord, maybe you're already saved, tonight would be a great night to realize that there is a lost world around us everywhere we go and that our expression of faith in this place ought to cause a zeal for evangelism outside of it.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you that you created us to respond to you, that you've created us, God, you've designed us to speak on behalf of you. God, may we be as Colossians 3:17 said, may everything we do be done unto you. It is the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.