

God-Centered Evangelism: John 10:1-30
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Next Sunday we will resume our study in the letter of James, and I'm eager to pick up where we left off and work our way through the remainder of that book. But, as I said two weeks ago, I've had a few things on my heart and I'm taking these three weeks to address them. Two weeks ago I preached on our joyful responsibility to teach the next generation. Last Sunday we looked at the purpose of small groups and the immense importance of living the Christian life alongside other believers. We need to be in each other's lives, considering how to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Finally, this morning I want to preach on God-Centered evangelism. I want to encourage us and inspire us in this awesome task that God has called us to. The third line of our mission statement says that we exist "to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world." This is what we're called to. This is what Jesus has commissioned us to do, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV) I pray that we will be passionate about this as a church. I pray that God will open up doors of opportunity for us and mobilize us and use us for His glory in this city. It's for this purpose that we have made some significant changes in the past year. We want to position ourselves in such a way that we can proclaim the glory of the cross to all the peoples of Pittsburgh.

One piece of this is having our Sunday morning gatherings in the downtown area. We want to be in a place that is accessible from all the neighborhoods of this city and the surrounding area. We desire for this church to look more and more like heaven, by becoming more ethnically diverse. And so we want to be in this central location with the prayer that God will use us to impact all the peoples of Pittsburgh.

For the time being God has provided us with this wonderful venue for our Sunday morning services, and it's our continued prayer that at the right time He will give us a more permanent location here in the downtown area. I get so excited when I think that God may use these efforts and these steps of faith and our perseverance in this ministry to plant us here in the center of Pittsburgh to be an abiding witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I dream of this church being here for generations to come, if the Lord tarries, and not only being here, but much more importantly,

continuing to faithfully proclaim the truth of God's Word, faithfully pointing people to the cross of Christ, faithfully instilling in people a delight in the beauty of God's greatness. That's what I long to see happen here.

In addition to meeting in downtown on Sunday mornings, we also meet in small groups throughout the city. This is another piece of how we hope to impact all the peoples of Pittsburgh. Corporate gathering in downtown, small group gatherings in more and more of the city neighborhoods and suburban areas. These are the changes we've made in the past year in order to pursue what God has called us to be and do.

And this morning I want to encourage us specifically in the task of evangelism. There are many passages I could go to in order to do this. I could preach on the Great Commission, which I already read. We could look at the passage where Jesus tells His disciples that He is going to make them fishers of men (Matthew 4:19). I could take you to the book of Acts and preach on chapter 1:8-9, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8, ESV) Or Paul's speech to the Areopagus in Acts 17. Or Romans 10:14-16, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Romans 10:14-15, ESV) Or many other passages that would teach us various things about evangelism. And, Lord willing, I will preach on those passages at some point in the future. But what I want to do this morning is talk about God-centered evangelism, and therefore I want to give us a foundation for evangelism that is rooted in God's sovereignty and power. I want us to have a foundation under us that will sustain us and motivate us for the rest of our lives. And I believe that foundation is the sovereignty of God. We can persevere in evangelism and ministry and missions, because we know that God is going to accomplish His mission. It's something He has promised to do, and it's our great privilege to be part of it.

And therefore the passage I want us to go to is John 10. In Jesus' teaching here we'll see some very bold statements of God's sovereignty in salvation, and in this way I believe we'll find great encouragement and hope in the task of evangelism. I preached from this passage about a year and a half ago during a missions emphasis month. The title of that sermon was *Missions: The Certainty of Its Accomplishment*. We can be certain that the task of missions will be completed because God is absolutely sovereign

over the salvation of sinners. He is the One who saves, and He will save whomever He pleases, and it will all happen exactly according to His plan. There's great encouragement in this for missionaries who are going to very difficult areas of the world. It may seem that there is no fruit, no interest, no spiritual openness. But we can rest in the promise that God is going to accomplish His purposes, and He has promised to save individuals from every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9). The application for evangelism is the same, and especially in a city where so many nations are represented. We have so many opportunities to share the Gospel with unbelievers, and we can do so with the confidence that God *is* going to save His elect, He *is* going to accomplish His purposes, He *is* going to keep His promises.

I want to begin by pointing out some things from this passage that show us God's sovereignty in salvation, and then later I'll talk about how our understanding of God's sovereignty in salvation affects our evangelism. So first of all, let's see very clearly from these verses that the determining factor in salvation is ultimately God's choice, not our choice. God is the initiator. He is One who chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Look in our passage in verse 3. It says, "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." This shows us Jesus' initiative in calling to Himself those who have been chosen. They are His *own* sheep, and He *calls* them. And it's not just a general call. It's a very specific call. He calls them *by name*. It's also an effectual call, because the sheep hear His voice, and He leads them out. It's not as though Jesus calls, but the sheep won't listen. Those whom He calls will hear and will follow. Verse 4 says, "and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

In verse 11 we see another aspect of Jesus' initiative and sovereignty in the work of redemption. He says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." This is an amazing statement of Jesus' determination to sacrifice Himself for His sheep. Jesus had His face set toward the cross. His purpose was to die on that wooden cross, and to do so for us, His sheep. This ought to stir up in us a deep love for Christ. What a sacrifice He made! What pain He endured! And He did this *for us*! He knew who He was dying for. He was dying for the elect, those who had been chosen before the foundation of the world. He laid down His life specifically for His sheep. D. A. Carson, in his commentary on John, writes, "Jesus' death is here presented as a sacrifice peculiarly directed to the redemption *of his sheep* . . . This emphasis on the *intentionality* of Jesus' sacrifice is itself grounded on Jesus' peculiar intimacy with his sheep, an intimacy

whose proper analogy is the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son,” (pg. 387) which we see in verses 14-15, “I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” What an awesome thing this is: there’s a profound intimacy between the Father and the Son, and similar to that is the Son’s relationship to His sheep, for whom He died.

Do you see in this God’s sovereignty and intentionality in salvation? Jesus didn’t die just to make salvation possible for anyone who might choose to believe. He laid down His life specifically for His sheep. He died for the elect. He purchased their salvation in a definite and effective way. It was not left to chance. It was not left to the will of man. Christ died for the sheep, and the sheep will be saved. They hear His voice and follow Him.

I want to read you a quote from Charles Spurgeon which captures so well the fact that our salvation has to be attributed wholly to God. We can’t take any of the credit for our faith in Him. It was not a choice that we made that was the ultimate factor, but God’s choice.

“When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me.” So at first he thought, I’m the one doing this. I’m pursuing God. I’m the one making the determining choice. But then, awhile later, he says, “The thought struck me, *How did you come to be a Christian?* I sought the Lord. *But how did you come to seek the Lord?* The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, *How came I to pray?* I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. *How came I to read the Scriptures?* I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, ‘I ascribe my change wholly to God.’”

I encourage you to think about your own conversion. Ask yourself the question, Why am I, right now, trusting in Jesus Christ? Why do I love Him? Why do I delight in Him? What happened in my heart that made we want to follow Christ rather than run away from Him? And we might go through the same list that Spurgeon did. I sought the Lord. I prayed. I read the Bible. I . . . I . . . I. And, of course, it’s true that I sought the Lord and prayed and read the Bible. But my seeking the Lord, my prayers, my study of the Scriptures is not what made me a Christian. God

made me a Christian. God saved me and changed my desires, and it's only as a result of His regenerating work in my life that I seek Him, pray to Him, read His Word.

We see this very clearly in verse 26 of John 10. There Jesus says to the Jews, "The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock." Don't skim over those words. Think about what Jesus is saying. If you read the Bible carefully enough, it will blow your mind! We have our preconceived notions of things, and it's so easy to read those into the Bible. But when we read carefully and study carefully, we will have those presuppositions reshaped by the logic of God's Word.

What would we expect Jesus to communicate in this statement? We would expect Him to say the reverse of what He actually says. According to a man-centered understanding of salvation, which is our default way of thinking, we would expect Him to say, "you are not part of my flock because you do not believe." In other words, the human will is the determining factor. If you choose to believe, then you'll become part of the flock. But that's not what He says. He says, "you do not believe because you are not part of my flock." Isn't that incredible! Those who are not part of the flock will not believe. Those who *are* part of the flock *will* believe. Verse 27 makes that contrasting point, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Don't miss the bold statement of God's sovereignty in these verses. God's choice is ultimate. He elects individuals for salvation, and gives them to the Son. The Son lays down His life for the sheep, and effectually calls them to Himself, and they hear Him and follow Him.

A similar statement is found in John 8:47, where Jesus says, "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God." And, turning back a couple more chapters, Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." And in 6:65, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." These statements are filled with the sovereignty of God. It is God who draws people to the Son. It is the Father who must grant that individuals come to Jesus. We may look back on our conversion and think that we initiated a relationship with God. But it was God who initiated a relationship with us. We would have never come to Him if He did not draw us.

Back in chapter 10, in verses 28-30, we see another point about God's sovereignty in salvation, namely, that He preserves us to the end. "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has

given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." So God not only chooses us and regenerates us, but He also sustains us. He causes us to persevere in the faith. From start to finish, salvation belongs to the Lord.

Let me read you a couple verses from the book of Acts to illustrate this point, and then we'll move on to some applications of this truth for evangelism. In Acts 13:48, Paul and Barnabas are preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, and they announce that they are turning to the Gentiles because the Jews were hardened in unbelief. And the verse says, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." Do you see what happened here? All these Gentiles believed, and those who believed were the ones who had been appointed to eternal life. In other words, the ones God had chosen. The elect.

Similarly in Acts 16:14 we see the conversion of Lydia. It says, "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." Here, too, we see how God's work is primary and ultimate. He has to draw us. He has to open our hearts. He has to change us before we will believe.

So God is absolutely sovereign in the salvation of sinners. And now we can talk about how this truth affects our evangelism. Let's look at verse 16 in John 10. Jesus says, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." He's talking about Gentiles here—sheep who are not of the fold of Israel, but are of other folds. And this is a promise that should give us great boldness and perseverance in the work of evangelism and missions. Because Jesus is mighty to save, and He will save all of His sheep, and He has other sheep! There are sheep out there who have not yet been saved. Hear the determination in Jesus' words. "I *must* bring them also, and they *will* listen to my voice." This is not a plan that is going to fail. Jesus' purpose will not be thwarted. And therefore we can have great boldness and courage and hope in the task of evangelism. As we share the Gospel with family members and co-workers and neighbors and friends and people we meet on the bus or the plane or walking down the street, our hope is in the fact that the sheep will hear the voice of the shepherd and they will follow Him. For those who are unwilling to listen to the Gospel and unwilling to follow Christ, that may mean they're not sheep. Or it may simply be that this is not the precise time God has ordained to save them. Maybe the seeds are being planted, and they will be converted next week or next year or ten years from now. And we must pray that God will yet save them. We must press on in sharing the truth.

We must continue in the work of evangelism even when there is little or no fruit.

And it's the truth of God's sovereignty that will cause us to persevere in this work and keep us faithful to the Gospel. If we thought that the results were up to us, then we would either give up or we would change the message. We would either say, This isn't working, I quit. Or we would say, This isn't working, let's tweak the message. Let's try softening the message a little bit. Let's not talk about sin, and let's focus on addressing the felt-needs of unbelievers, and then maybe we'll see some results.

It's God's sovereignty in salvation that will encourage us when we're not seeing the fruit we long to see, and it's God's sovereignty in salvation that will also keep us true to the biblical Gospel, trusting that God is going to work through His appointed means and in His own timing to accomplish His purposes.

My hope in all that has been said thus far is that we will see the excitement and privilege of evangelism. I don't want to guilt trip you into sharing the Gospel with others. I don't want to give you some kind of quota to fill. I want you to be encouraged! I want you to know that God is at work. I want us to hear the Lord saying to us, like He did to Paul in Acts 18, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you or harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (vv. 9-10). I believe that God has many people in this city, many sheep for whom Christ died. And it is our pleasure to be used as God's means to draw these sheep to Himself.

I want to close with three specific words of encouragement, as we each apply this message to our own lives.

1) Examine Your Heart

I don't want you to walk away from this message with some artificial expectations for yourself concerning evangelism. Rather, I want each of us to examine our hearts and try to discern why it is that we are not more zealous in evangelism. What fears are hindering me? Why is there a lack of passion in my heart? Why don't I have a greater love for the lost? Why don't I have a greater love for God's glory? And then as we look honestly into our own hearts we can begin to pray for God to change us in these ways. We can pray that God will fill us with such a delight in the Gospel that we cannot contain it. We can pray that God will break our hearts for the lost sinners who are all around us. We can pray for God's name to be exalted in this city. So begin by examining your heart and pleading with God to change you.

2) Take a Step

Next, I simply encourage you to take a step. Take one step. Don't compare yourself to gifted evangelists and feel defeated because you think you'll never be able to do that. You don't have

to take ten steps at once. You may be scared to death to talk to anyone about the Gospel. And I just say to you, take a step. Take a step toward being a more effective witness in your sphere of influence. Start praying consistently for specific unbelievers whom you know. Think about how you might get to know them better. Think about questions you might be able to ask and things you could share about your own life that could open up a spiritual conversation. Give some thought to your own conversion and your walk with Christ, and how you would describe that to an unbeliever. Think about how to communicate the Gospel in a clear and concise way. Wherever you are in terms of evangelism, take a step.

3) Use the Community of Believers

And then finally, use the community of believers. I think one of our most powerful evangelistic tools is the gathered body of believers. Whether it's a small group, a Sunday School class, a worship service, or some kind of fellowship gathering, these are great opportunities to let unbelievers see what Christians are like. Jesus says in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35, ESV) There are two convicting truths there. First, we need to love one another, just as Christ has loved us. And secondly, our love for one another will be a testimony to the world that we are Christ's disciples. So many unbelievers have an idea in their head of what Christians are like. And they may be 100% convinced that they would never want to have anything to do with Christ because they think all Christians are hypocrites and are mean and unloving and greedy and no fun to be around. And they may meet one Christian who's not like that and think that he's the exception. But if they come into your home for a small group gathering, or if they come to one of our fellowships, or if they come on a Sunday morning, they'll see a group of people who have a genuine love for each other, and who are honest about their problems, and are thoughtful of others, and love to laugh. This is a powerful evangelistic tool, and we should not overlook it.

Therefore, invite unbelievers to our times of fellowship. Invite unbelievers to your small group. Invite unbelievers to Sunday School and these worship services. This doesn't mean that we're going to cater to the interests and tastes of unbelievers. But as we exalt Christ in our singing and praying and preaching and fellowship, these things will be a powerful witness to those who behold it.

Examine your heart. Take a step. Use the community of believers.

We want to let you know that we have some resources that we hope you will use. We have JOY booklets and 2 Ways to Live tracts that are free for you to take. Take as many as you will use. There are also labels with the church's information on them that you can stick to those tracts. I'd encourage you to have some of these in your pocket, in your briefcase, in your purse, wherever you go, so that when you have an opportunity to speak with someone you can leave them with some reading material and also a way of finding a church where they will hear the Gospel. And we also now have, thanks to Zeek McGalla, some invitation cards that we hope you will use to let people know about the church. This may be a great conversation starter. It's something you could hand to a neighbor, or a friend, or a co-worker. This may be your step that you take in becoming a more effective witness. So take what you will use. We will try to keep these things stocked so that you can get more when you need more. And may we go into this city and into our neighborhoods trusting that there are many sheep here who will hear the Shepherd's voice and follow Him.