
Summer Seminars: 3) Fulfil God's Mission more thoroughly.

Opening Prayer:

Father, thank you your gospel found its way to each one of us by your sovereign goodness. Thank you that it was communicated to us, that you opened our eyes to understand it and respond to your grace. Father thank you that you not only converted us but you have recruited us to hold out this only word of life, to a lost and dying world. Father it is this area of life that we struggle with most, so would you equip us, encourage us and send us out to make much of you in our evangelism."

This week we turn to evangelism. Today we'll be talking about how the aim of evangelism is to reconcile sinners to God through Jesus Christ, so that they can worship Him, who is their Creator as well as Redeemer.

Jesus, in His witness to the Samaritan woman in John 4, establishes the link between evangelism and worship:

John 4:23

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

God's glory is the goal of evangelism. He is most glorified when redeemed sinners praise and worship Him for His saving grace from their hearts. These are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

So we see that the call to be a follower of Christ is a call to all-of-life worship. This all of life worship then includes evangelism. In regard to missions John Piper writes in Let the Nations Be Glad, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."

i) Origin and Content of Evangelism

So what is evangelism? A simple definition is that evangelism is communicating the gospel.

A definition from Mack Stiles in his book on evangelism is that, "evangelism is teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade."

"Evangelism" comes from the Greek word "*evangelion*". *Evangelion* is the word that we call the "gospel". Here is an older definition of *Evangelion*, "[This word] is a Greek word; and signifieth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a man's heart glad, and maketh him sing, dance and leap for joy."

So "evangelism" is a sharing of this good news that makes men sing, dance, leap, etc.

Did the idea of heralding “good news” pop-up randomly in the New Testament? No, the “good news” or the “gospel” in the New Testament is directly linked to what “good news” would have meant in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 40:6-11

A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.”

You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!”

See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Just before this passage in verses 1-3 it describes the one who was sent to make paths straight. This was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Isaiah 40:1-3 ~ John the Baptist).

Then in verse 9-11 we see that the voice crying out was crying out this idea of the announcement of “good tidings” (particularly 40:9). This is what the gospel writers pick up on when they speak of the “good news” of Jesus Christ. The gospel accounts apply the idea of this “good news” toward the coming of God Himself in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 39 through 40 of Isaiah are all about how the exile of Israel is over and God is coming in grace... so be prepared! Likewise John the Baptist is saying that God is coming in Jesus Christ, so prepare yourself: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 3:2)

It is no surprise then that Jesus starts His ministry quoting Isaiah 61:1-3. This is an example of Jesus Himself applying the meaning of “good news” from Isaiah directly to Himself! (Isaiah 52:7 touches on this theme of “good news” as well)

The main point of these passages as they relate to Jesus Christ is that we are all under exile. The Bible says that we are slaves to our sin and that it rules us apart from Jesus Christ. But through Jesus Christ we have the gospel or the good news.

What is the gospel then? Here is a good way to explain it:

The good news is that the one and only God, who is holy, made us in his image to know him. But we sinned and cut ourselves off from him.

In his great love, God became a man in Jesus, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross, thus fulfilling the law himself and taking on himself the punishment for the sins of all those who would ever turn and trust in him.

He rose again from the dead, showing that God accepted Christ’s sacrifice and that God’s wrath against us had been exhausted.

He now calls us to repent of our sins and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness.

If we repent of our sins and trust in Christ, we are born again into a new life, an eternal life with God.

The ***gospel*** calls sinners to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin. We cannot earn God's favour with our works. But we can be reconciled to Him through faith alone in Christ alone. God promises to receive all those who come to Him through Jesus.

J.I. Packer, in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, has given us a fuller definition of evangelism: It is to present ***Jesus Christ*** in the power of ***the Holy Spirit*** to sinful people in order that they may come to put their ***trust in God through Him***, to receive ***Him as their Saviour***, and serve ***Him as their King*** in the fellowship of ***His Church***.

Are we as evangelistic as we should be?

Sadly, none of us can say that we are. Personal witness is often difficult and can feel risky. Often it leaves us vulnerable to scorn and hostility from unbelievers. It may also be a slow process, where we might experience months or even years of rejection before someone responds.

We, however, should not lose heart. Rather, we should let God's Word convict us about the importance and necessity of evangelism.

ii. Evangelism Is Essential in the life of the Believer.

Evangelism is part of all of life worship. As we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ we will reflect His very character.

We evangelize because we have been evangelized. Our desire to share the gospel comes from the very character of God. To look at this we should consider God's call to us in Isaiah 55:1.

Isaiah 55:1

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

Our desire to herald the good news that people might be reconciled to God comes from His own nature to call us to be reconciled to Himself. To come with no money and to quench our thirst.

In this vein then we are not all expected to use the same methods of evangelism, but we are all expected to evangelize.

A. Evangelism is a matter of *obedience*

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself has commanded us to witness.

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Matthew 28:19-20

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

These commands were not given to the apostles only. Jesus' words "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matthew 28:20) make it clear that His command to evangelize has relevance for all Christians through the end of this present manifestation of God's creation. The question for us is: Are we obedient to our Lord in this matter?

B. Evangelism is a matter of *gratitude*

The Bible speaks of worship and evangelism as the right responses to God's saving grace, and a trust in God's future grace. As those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, should it not be our joy to proclaim His love and mercy to those around us?

Our attitude should be that of the psalmist in Psalm 116.

Psalm 116:12-14

How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD.
I will fulfil my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

Verse 13 speaks of the response of worship, while verse 14 focuses on the *public* praise of God's grace. In his comments on verse 14, C.H. Spurgeon said:

This will show that we are not ashamed of our Lord, and it may be a great benefit to those who look on and hear us publicly sounding forth the praises of our prayer-hearing God.

How can those do this who have never with their mouth confessed their Saviour? O secret disciples, what say you to this verse! Be encouraged to come into the light and own your Redeemer. If, indeed, you have been saved, come forward and declare it in His own appointed way.

C. Evangelism is an expression of *godliness*

As God's people, we ought to commend the gospel to those around us by the way we live. Our lives should consistently be characterized by holiness, in such a way as to make our Saviour more attractive to unbelievers.

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

In a sermon preached on this verse, Spurgeon said it teaches us two key points: "*The first is, the life of the believer is, or ought to be, full of soul-blessing. In the second place, the pursuit of the believer ought always to be soul-winning.*"

Do our lives reflect Christ? Are we, through our witness, a blessing to those around us?

D. Evangelism is *every Christian's calling as a part of all-of-life worship*

Some Christians think that evangelism is a gift and the responsibility of only those with that gift. They appeal to Ephesians 4:11 for support.

Ephesians 4:11

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

The point of this verse, however, is not that only those who have the gift of evangelism should evangelize. Rather, the verse speaks of how God has graciously given different gifts to different men in a variety of ministries so that His Church can be built up.

So while not all of us are specially gifted to carry out the vocational ministry of an evangelist, the fact remains that **all** of us are called to be witnesses for Christ. We should think of our responsibility for personal evangelism from the perspective of 1 Peter 2:9.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

According to this verse, God has chosen us in Christ for a purpose. This is in order that we may proclaim the Excellencies of Christ to a dying world enslaved by the darkness of sin. All of us ought to witness because our evangelism glorifies God by proclaiming the glories of His grace.

The verse also establishes the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The Church is a kingdom of priests. As Christians, all of us have a duty to perform **a mediatorial service that declares** the will of God to the world and bears human needs before God's throne in prayer.

As those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, a ministry of reconciliation has been given to us. We are commissioned by God Himself to be His ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We should follow Paul's example. Knowing that he was an ambassador for Christ filled him with a sense of duty and urgency. He saw himself as God's representative, calling sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Paul implored others on Christ's behalf, as though God were making His appeal through him.

Further, as we are called to live and bear the fruit of joy we can fight for joy in evangelism.

We should count it a joy and a privilege that God has entrusted to us the gospel. Are we good stewards of this message? As ambassadors for Christ, do we represent Him faithfully and diligently?

QUESTIONS – WHY WE DON'T EVANGELIZE AS MUCH AS WE OUGHT?

iii. Evangelism is Empowered

Perhaps one of the most common reasons why many of us fail to be better witnesses for Christ is because of fear. This can take several forms: We might be afraid of our own lack of ability, we might be afraid of rejection, or we might be afraid of the sheer seriousness of the message.

The best way to overcome such fears is to have a biblical view of evangelism. A good starting point is understanding that God is sovereign in the salvation of sinners.

God, in His grace, has elected sinners unto salvation. He has promised that He will gather a people for Himself from every tongue, tribe and nation. It was this knowledge of God's sovereignty that gave the missionary **Adoniram Judson** the confidence to labour almost 40 years in Burma:

- Despite being told on his way that Burma was impermeable to Christian evangelism,
- Waiting years before seeing any conversions,

- Enduring a 17 year imprisonment,
- And many other hardships including, “a life-long battle in the 108-degree heat with cholera, malaria, dysentery, and unknown miseries that would take two of Judson's wives and seven of his 13 children, and colleague after colleague in death.”

The same knowledge encouraged Paul while he laboured in Corinth. God assured Paul that his evangelism would not be in vain, because His elect were in the city.

Acts 18:9-11

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

We can therefore witness with confidence, knowing that our efforts will bear fruit. God uses us as instruments to call His people to faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. God's sovereignty should spur us on in our evangelism.

Our sovereign God draws sinners to Jesus Christ. And He has also equipped His people for the task of evangelism. We read earlier in the Great Commission how Jesus promised to be with His followers always, indeed to “the very end of the age”. He has fulfilled this promise by giving us His Spirit, who was poured out upon Christians at Pentecost.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Looking at the context of Acts 1, we find that the apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit. A reason for this could be so they would realize that the power for evangelism did not come from their own strength, but from God who enables them.

What an encouragement this is for us in our witness! If evangelism depended upon our own natural ability, there would be cause for despair. Which one of us can say with full confidence that we are sufficient for such a serious responsibility?

But the power of evangelism comes not from us, but from the Holy Spirit. From the instant the Spirit indwells us, He gives us the power to witness. Evangelism is expected of every Christian because every Christian is empowered to do so!

The evidence you’ve been given the power to evangelize is a changed life. The same Holy Spirit that changed your life for Christ is the power to witness for Christ. Be confident that if your life has been changed by the gospel, you are equipped to share the gospel.

Some of us might feel that we are too sinful to be good witnesses for Christ. But while it is true that we need to lead Christ-like lives so that our witness is not hindered, it does not mean that we must delay evangelism until we reach sinless perfection.

As Don Whitney says: “Part of the beauty of our message is that God saves sinners, sinners like us... The practice of consistent Christian living does empower evangelism, but a Christian recovery from your own un-Christian living strengthens your witness in another, very believable way.”

God delights in using weak instruments so that He alone gets the glory. Do you feel lacking in your ability to witness? Then ask God for grace to do so! He has promised in His Word to give grace to the humble. We should depend upon Him, and not on our own strength. May the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians be ours also.

2 Corinthians 3:5

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

And not only do we have the help of the Holy Spirit, the message of the gospel itself is powerful, able to save all those who believe it.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Romans 1:16-17

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The gospel we share is a powerful message – it is able to save because it reveals how we can obtain a righteousness that justifies us in the sight of God, a righteousness that comes from faith in Christ alone.

This does not mean that the gospel is some kind of magic wand we can wave over unbelievers and the power of God will spring from it and automatically convert all of them.

But it does mean that the gospel is the power of God for salvation and not our own eloquent power or persuasiveness. God has His elect whom He will call through the gospel.

We can trust that God will apply the gospel powerfully upon the heart of unbelievers. By His Spirit, He regenerates sinners who are dead in their sins and trespasses. He takes away their hearts of stone and gives them a heart of flesh so that they are able to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

How should we measure success in evangelism?

Success in evangelism is sharing the gospel. Our job is just to be faithful in pointing men and women to Jesus Christ. Conversions are the fruit that God alone gives, according to His own counsel. So of us will plant the seed, others will water, but it is God who gives the growth.

Therefore, our responsibility is to point needy sinners to Jesus, to tell them of a fountain filled with the blood of Christ, where they can come and wash their guilt away.

Be faithful and trust God for the results. Let Ecclesiastes 11:4-6 and John 4:35-37 be an encouragement to us.

Ecclesiastes 11:4-6

4 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

5 As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

6 Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

John 4:35-37

35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. **36** Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. **37** Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.

COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS

IV. Evangelism is a Discipline

Evangelism is a natural overflow of the Christian life, but we *must not just wait* for *witnessing opportunities* to happen.

God intends for every Christian to find ways to share the gospel with unbelievers. In whatever context the Lord places us to live our lives, He calls us to find ways to fulfil the Great Commission.

Some opportunities are ours by nature of our responsibility as parents.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

However, not all opportunities for witness come naturally. Evangelism is a *discipline that we must cultivate in our lives*. It involves a deliberate effort on our part to invest time and energy in the lives of unbelievers in order to share the gospel with them.

In Colossians, we learn about the excellencies of the all-sufficient Christ. He is "the image of the invisible God". He is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent". In Christ, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." (Col 1:15f)

These great truths about Christ should stir our hearts to bear witness for Him. So it is no surprise that towards the end of the epistle, Paul exhorts Christians to be fervent in evangelism.

Colossians 4:3-6

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

From these verses, we learn several ways by which we can discipline ourselves for evangelism.

First, we should **pray**. Paul asked the Colossian Christians to pray for opportunities for him to share the gospel, as well as to pray that he would proclaim the message clearly. We should pray for these things as well. Do we ask God for opportunities to witness? Do we ask Him for grace to be better witnesses of Christ?

Second, we need to “be wise in the way we act towards unbelievers” (Colossians 4:5). We need to **watch our lives** and make sure our actions do not undermine the credibility of our Christian witness. Do we discipline ourselves to live godly lives that commend the gospel, or are we careless in the way we live before a watching world?

Third, Paul urges us to “make the most of every opportunity” (Ephesians 5:16). The sense of this exhortation is this: Do not just sit there waiting for an opportunity to fall into your lap, but **actively pursue opportunities** for witness.

The time is short and we ought to be filled with a sense of urgency in sharing the gospel. This means making time for others. All of us have busy schedules that revolve around work, family, friends and church. That is why we need to discipline ourselves to spend fruitful time with unbelievers.

Don Whitney suggests having meals regularly with non-Christians. This could involve inviting unbelievers home for a meal or meeting a co-worker for lunch.

The key, he says, is not just to rub shoulders with unbelievers, but to dialog with them in such a way that their hearts and minds might be opened to the gospel. He adds that an excellent way to turn the conversation to spiritual matters is to ask them *how you can pray for them*.

Another way to capitalise on opportunities for evangelism is to give out evangelistic literature. It is always helpful to have such materials close at hand – at home, at the workplace, in the car, or while travelling.

A **fourth** way we can discipline ourselves for evangelism is to **be careful in what we say**. We should discipline our tongues such that what we say is consistently “full of grace” (Colossians 4:6). Our words should be a blessing to unbelievers, pointing them to Christ.

“Seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6), in the words of one commentator, means that our speech has flavour. It is not empty or insipid, but thought-provoking and worthwhile. Our speech should also be winsome, as we persuade unbelievers to come to Christ.

The aim of all this is so that we may “know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6). Knowing what to say as we witness involves forethought and preparation. One way to prepare ourselves is to read good books that help us in our evangelism

And, of course, we need to know the gospel well. Do we desire to grow in our knowledge and understanding of Christ – both of His Person as well as of His work? Then meditate often on gospel truths. And not only will this deepen our understanding, it will also inspire gratitude to God and a heart for evangelism.

V. More Application

Here are three questions for us to reflect upon:

- Since evangelism is expected, will we obey the Lord and witness?
- Since evangelism is empowered, will we believe God can use our words in the salvation of others?
- Since evangelism is a discipline, will we plan for it? Will we commit ourselves to at least one way of intentional evangelism in the near future?