

Make Known the Gospel (Part II)

Introduction

Last week, I was so blessed to just sit in the pews along with all of you and hear the Gospel. As I listened, I tried to put myself in the position of one who was hearing it for the very first time. As I did this, all I could do was rejoice and be glad that this good news had come to me – that I had heard the message of God’s salvation, and that I’m now holding fast to it by faith.

As Caleb preached, he really captured the driving passion of Paul when he said: “*Without* the Gospel, there is *no* Christianity. There is *no* hope for us or for the world. As sinners, our only hope for salvation is through and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the *only* remedy for a sin-cursed world. The Gospel is the *only* hope for us in our life and in our death.” Paul says in Romans one:

- Romans 1:16 — I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

What is the power of God for salvation? The Gospel is. Is there *anything else* that is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes? No. There is nothing else. The Apostle Peter says:

- Acts 4:12 — There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

And so even as I rejoiced and was glad that the good news had come to me, I began to be convicted. And I started asking questions. To be honest, these are questions that I’ve been asking for quite a long time. If we really believe that the Gospel is “the *only* good news for a fallen, broken world” (Fee; Phil. 1:12-14), and if we really believe that the Gospel *is*, all by itself, the very power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, then what will this mean? Well, what did it mean for Paul? For Paul, it meant the absolute necessity of evangelism – of making the Gospel *known*. What could possibly be more logical or more obvious than that? Right?

Because of what Paul believed *about* the Gospel, *therefore* evangelism was, as one person says, his “meat and potatoes” (Fee). *Because* of what Paul believed about the Gospel, *therefore making known* the Gospel to others was the “bread and butter” of Paul’s life – it was his zeal and passion.

Now I know at this point we may be thinking: But that was Paul, the Apostle. That’s true, and I’ll speak to that in the coming weeks, but for right now let’s just think of the “logic” of the Gospel itself. We heard last week: “If we truly believe that the Gospel is the only power to save a sinner and that it *is* wholly powerful to save a sinner, this will transform *our* life.” And how might it do this? Is it possible that the “logic” of the Gospel might transform even *our* lives when it comes to making it known to others? As we think about this, I want to spend the next few minutes of our time this morning asking and trying to answer this question: What is the *biblical* “*method*” for making the Gospel known?

The Only Biblical Method of Evangelism

We live in a day when much has been made of “relational evangelism.” This is the idea that we go out and purposefully develop relationships with unbelievers so that we can do *all*, or at the very least, *most* of our evangelism within the context of these relationships. Now, of course, evangelism in the context of relationships certainly isn’t a bad thing. It’s a *good* thing! But very often, associated with the relational method are ideas like these: It’s better to “*share*” the Gospel (subtly/suggestively) than to “preach” the Gospel. I must first *earn the right* to “share” the Gospel. It’s best to share the Gospel *gradually and “organically”* in the context of relationship. The question is, to what extent are these ideas that we may associate with “relational evangelism” really consistent with the Scriptures?

In the New Testament, the word for “gospel” or “good news” is “*euangelion*.” If you take this noun and turn it into a verb, you get “*euangelizo*.” So what is the “good news” turned into a verb? In Bible times there were no phones, no internet, no mass produced print publications. So when there was *news* that needed to be carried from one place to another, the only way to do that was by sending a messenger – and if the news was urgent, preferably a messenger who could run fast. Now there were potentially two different kinds of news to be carried – good news or bad news. There was usually a reward for bringing *good* news, so obviously that’s the kind of news you wanted to bring. In fact, if you were a messenger, you wanted to be *known*, and have the reputation for the bringing of *good* news. (cf. 1 Sam. 31:8-9; 2 Sam. 4:9-10; 18:19-33; 1 Kings 1:41-43) And so that’s what that word *euangelizo* came to mean. It means the *bringing* and then the *announcing* of *good* news by a messenger who was sent out for that specific purpose.

- 1 Samuel 31:8–9 — The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to **carry the good news** [euangelizo] to the house of their idols and to the people.
- 2 Samuel 18:19–27 (cf. 2 Sam. 4:9-10; 1 Kings 1:41-43) — Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, “Let me run and **carry the good news** [euangelizo] to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.” And Joab said to him, “You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king’s son is dead.” Then Joab said to the Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, “Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite.” And Joab said, “Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?” “Come what may,” he said, “I will run.” So he said to him, “Run.” Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite. Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, “If he is alone, there is news in his mouth.” And he drew nearer and nearer. The watchman saw another man running. And the watchman called to the gate and said, “See, another man running alone!” The king said, “He also brings news.” The watchman said, “I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.” And the king said, “He is a good man and comes with good news [euangelion/gospel].”

So now in light of this background, maybe we can have a whole new appreciation for this well-known verse in Isaiah fifty-two:

- Isaiah 52:7 — How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who **brings good news** [*euangelizo*], who *publishes* peace, who **brings good news** of happiness, who *publishes* salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Now think about it: What if this messenger had waited until he had a personal relationship with everyone before he told them the good news? Well, then the obvious fact is that *most* of those who needed to hear the good news would have never heard! Can you imagine this messenger subtly and suggestively “sharing” the good news? No! He is boldly and joyfully announcing and proclaiming the good news! Is there any sense in which this messenger first needs to earn the right to announce his good news? Not at all! The good news is itself what gives him the right to announce it. So keeping all these same things in mind, let’s read two other verses from Isaiah:

- Isaiah 40:9 — Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, **herald of good news**; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, **herald of good news**; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”
- Isaiah 61:1 — The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to **bring good news** to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

Once again, in both of these verses, personal relationships appear to be beside the point. There is no subtle or suggestive or gradual sharing of the good news. There is no earning the right to deliver the message. There is no waiting around to be asked. No, the messenger simply *announces* his message of good news with boldness and joy. Now that’s *Isaiah* in the *Old Testament*. But when we look ahead to the New Testament, we find that what we saw in Isaiah is actually the most basic idea or picture of New Testament evangelism. So listen to Paul:

- Romans 10:14–15 (cf. Luke 4:16-21 and Isa. 61:1) — 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 **proclaiming** [*kerusso*]? And how are they to **proclaim** [*kerusso*] unless they are *sent*? As it is written, “*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news* [*euangelidzo*]!”

And so we find this word “*euangelizo*” over fifty times in the New Testament, proving very clearly that the Gospel is a *message* that must be *delivered* and *preached*.

Now maybe we’re saying to ourselves: “But I’m not a preacher! I can’t talk in front of a crowd!” Well, the preaching of the gospel doesn’t require a crowd. The Bible says that the angel Gabriel was “*sent*” to “*preach the good news*” to Zechariah when he was all alone in the temple. (Luke 1:19) And Philip was sent out to a deserted desert road to “preached the good news about Jesus” to a lone Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:35) Not only does preaching not require a crowd, but it doesn’t require eloquent words or fancy speech. Paul says:

- 1 Corinthians 2:1–2 — And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

So what *does* the *preaching* of the Gospel mean? One thing that all preaching and proclaiming seems to assume is “boldness.” We’ll come back to this again next week, but for right now, remember what we read in Isaiah:

- Isaiah 40:9 — *Go on up to a high mountain*, O Zion, herald of good news; *lift up your voice with strength*, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; *lift it up, fear not*; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!”

At the heart of what it means to “*preach* the Gospel” is just this: to *announce boldly* the message of *good news to anyone and everyone* who still needs to hear. So not only do we have the verb “preach the Gospel” (*euangelizo*) but whenever we have just the noun, “Gospel,” it’s almost always connected with a *verb* meaning “to proclaim” (*kerusso*).¹ We just saw this word in Romans ten: “How are they to hear without someone *proclaiming* [*kerusso*]? And how are they to *proclaim* [*kerusso*] unless they are *sent*?” Paul speaks of “the Gospel that I *proclaim* among the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:2) and “the Gospel... which has been *proclaimed* in all creation” (Col. 1:23). Jesus came “*proclaiming* the Gospel of the kingdom,” (Mat. 4:23)² and also quoting Isaiah:

- Luke 4:18–19 — “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to *preach good news* [*euangelizo*] to the poor. He has sent me to *proclaim* [*kerusso*] liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to *proclaim* [*kerusso*] the year of the Lord’s favor.”

We’ll see in a moment that the Gospel is connected in another passage with a verb meaning “to declare.” (Eph. 6:18-20)³ Are you beginning to see the biblical picture of evangelism? It’s a proclaiming, a declaring, a preaching of good news to anyone and everyone who still needs to hear.

So what does all this mean for the question of “lifestyle evangelism”? Well basically, it means that there’s no such thing – it means that “lifestyle evangelism” is actually a contradiction in terms. Now of course, if we *mean* by lifestyle evangelism that we’re living a life that adorns and complements the proclaiming, and declaring, and preaching of the good news, then that’s great. (cf. Mat. 5:16; Titus 2:9-10) But no lifestyle, no matter how godly, should ever be associated with a method of evangelism.

¹ I’m specifically referring to those places where the *communication* of the Gospel is emphasized.

² Cf. Mat. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:14; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15; Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 9:14; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 2:2; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:9

³ The Gospel is also “spoken/said” (1 Thess. 2:1-2; *laleo*), “put forth/laid out” (1 Cor. 9:18; *tithemi*), and “imparted/given” (1 Thess. 2:8; *metadidomi*). This last word (*tithemi*) should not be associated with our modern idea of “sharing” the Gospel.

In the Bible, the *only* way to communicate the good news of the Gospel is with *words*. In the Bible, the *only* way to evangelize is with *words*. So in the book of Acts, which tells the story of the “preaching of the Gospel,” thirty-six times this Gospel is described as the “word” or as something that’s made known with “words” (*logos*).⁴

- Acts 2:22, 40-41; 4:29 — Men of Israel, hear these *words*... And with many other *words* he bore witness and continued to exhort them, *saying*... So those who received his *word* were baptized. Grant to your servants to continue to *speak* your *word* with all boldness.

Acts is *all about* a message summed up with words. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians:

- Ephesians 6:18–20 — [Pray] also for me, that *words* may be given to me in *opening my mouth boldly* to proclaim [make known / gnozizo] the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare [parresiazomai] it *boldly*, as I ought to *speak*.

So in light of the clear and overwhelming testimony of the Bible, it seems that it might be the most helpful to completely eliminate from our vocabulary phrases like “relational evangelism” and “lifestyle evangelism.” Yes, relationships and lifestyle can complement and be an aid to evangelism. They may be a context in which evangelism happens. But they’re not evangelism. From what we’ve seen so far, evangelism is very simply the *bold preaching* and *proclaiming* and *declaring* of the *good news* with *words* to *anyone* and *everyone* who still needs to hear.

In light of all this emphasis on “words” and on “preaching” we might think right away of the weekly meetings of the church where the *Gospel* is already being *preached* every Sunday to the saints. It’s tempting to adopt the method of drawing the unsaved into the church to hear the preaching of the Gospel. It’s tempting to want a church where our unsaved friends and neighbors will feel comfortable enough to come and be evangelized. But we saw several weeks ago that this *method* isn’t just unbiblical, it’s actually dangerous to the life of the church and the preservation of the true Gospel. That’s not to say that God can’t bring much good from an unbiblical method, or that there aren’t true Christians promoting this method, but we must be careful not to exalt our “wisdom” over against the wisdom of God. It may “look” like we know better to all outward appearances, but we are called to believe by faith that God’s ways and methods are best. So in the Bible, the Apostles and the evangelists are *sent out from* the churches to *go to* the unsaved and preach the Gospel message – just as in Isaiah we see the beautiful *feet* of the *messenger running to bring* the good news. In Acts, we see Peter in the house of Cornelius (10), Philip in the Ethiopian eunuch’s chariot (8), Paul standing before the Areopagus (17), Paul preaching to his jailor (16), Paul testifying in chains before governors, and kings, and emperors. In Acts 19 we find Paul “reasoning daily *in the hall of Tyrannus*,” (Acts 19:9) and then we read:

- Acts 19:10 — This continued for two years, so that *all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord*, both Jews and Greeks.

⁴ Acts 2:22, 40-41; 4:4, 29, 31; 6:2, 4, 7; 8:14, 25; 10:36, 44; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 26, 44, 46, 48-49; 14:3, 25; 14:25; 15:7, 35-36; 16:6, 32; 17:11, 13; 18:5, 11; 19:10, 20; 20:32; cf. 1 Cor. 1:17-18; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 1:13; 6:18-20; Phil. 1:14; 2:16; Col. 1:5-6; 1 Thess. 1:5-6; 2:13; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 4:2; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; Rev. 1:9

What we see from these examples is that evangelism can happen in all sorts of different contexts. But in all of these different contexts, there is still only one biblical *method* of evangelism. It is the *sending of messengers out into the world to boldly preach the Good News with words to anyone and everyone* who still needs to hear. There may be many other good things that Christians are doing, but nothing other than this can biblically be called evangelism.

We've talked about "relational evangelism," "lifestyle evangelism," and "church-service evangelism." I just want to mention one other thing: It's something I'll call "works-based evangelism." What I'm talking about is the idea that ministry to the *soul* needs to be accompanied by ministry to the *body*. Now Paul clearly says that as we have opportunity, we ought to do good to everyone. (Gal. 6:10; cf. 1 Thess. 5:15) But Paul also emphasizes that we are to do good *especially* to those who are of the household of the faith. (Gal. 6:10) In the Old Testament, most of the concern for the poor, and the needy, and the weak, and the afflicted was actually in the context of the covenant community – the context of one's covenant brothers and sisters. But people wrongly use the Old Testament today to try and prove that the primary means of the church's *outreach* today should be the feeding and clothing of the poor! This is simply not true. It's a very wrong use of Scripture. So when we come to Acts we'll find that when the Church organizes a daily distribution of food, it's not for the non-Christian widows outside of the church, but specifically for those widows who are disciples. (Acts 6:1; cf. 1 Tim. 5:9-16) And then we even hear the Apostles saying, "It is not right that we should give up *preaching the word of God to serve tables*." (Acts 6:2) Once again, the point is not that food pantries, and homeless shelters are not good things. They are. But their only ultimate value is if they are a *context* in which actual, true biblical evangelism is happening (I've seen this happen very effectively). Having said this, we still see very clearly that it's not at all necessary to feed the poor before we can evangelize the poor. In fact, what better way to insure that a person's physical needs will be met than to preach the Gospel to him so that he might be born again and come to share in all the love and fellowship of *this* – the covenant community? (cf. Acts 2:44-46; 4:32-36; Luke 18:29-30)

Conclusion

Well, this morning, we've asked the question: "What is the only biblical method of evangelism?" In the process of looking to the Bible to answer this question we've seen the potential errors and dangers of talking about "relational evangelism," "lifestyle evangelism," "church-service evangelism," and "works-based (or social-gospel) evangelism." But the point of identifying these errors and dangers was not to focus in on the negative, but rather to bring into the clearest possible relief and focus what true, biblical evangelism really is. You see, once we know what evangelism *is*, the biblical *method* of evangelism is automatically obvious! Evangelism is the *sending of messengers out into the world to boldly preach, and proclaim, and declare the Good News with words to anyone and everyone* who still needs to hear.

Now having said this, we probably have a whole host of other questions racing around in our minds. These are all questions that we're going to try to let the Word of God speak to in the next several weeks. But really the one question I want us all to go away asking this morning is just this: How are we as a church *biblically* "evangelizing" – especially in the community of Morris? As we'll see more next week, biblical *evangelism* is the *only* biblical "method" of church

growth. So how are we as a church boldly preaching the Gospel to those in Morris who still need to hear? How can we as a church be more, and more, and more faithful and joyful in our practice of biblical evangelism?

I don't think I'll ever forget driving back from the airport with Caleb talking about the Gospel and evangelism. We were approaching the Morris exit on I-80, and Caleb looked over at a blue house across the fields on Route 6, and he asked me: "How are you going to get the Gospel to that blue house?" I've often asked myself the same kinds of questions, but to have someone else ask me outright was definitely convicting. So now I'm asking all of us: "How might we bring the Gospel to that blue house?" What about to our friends, and neighbors, and acquaintances?

Remember, "*without* the Gospel, there is *no* Christianity. There is *no* hope for us or for the world. As sinners we can only find salvation through and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the *only* remedy for a sin-cursed world. The Gospel is the *only* hope for us in our life and in our death." And what did all of this mean for Paul? It meant the absolute necessity of evangelism – of making the Gospel known. As a church may we, too, be gripped and transformed by the simple "logic" of the Gospel.