

Make Known the Gospel (Part III)

Introduction

Last week, we asked the question: “What is the *only biblical method* of evangelism?” In the process of looking to the Bible to answer this question we saw the potential errors and dangers of talking about “relational evangelism,” lifestyle evangelism,” “church-service evangelism,” and “works-based (or social-gospel) evangelism.” The point of identifying these errors and dangers was not just to be critical or to focus in on the negative, but rather to bring into the clearest possible focus what true, biblical evangelism really is. And once we know what *evangelism* is, the biblical *method* of evangelism automatically becomes obvious! Evangelism is the *sending of messengers out into the world to preach, and proclaim, and declare* the *Good News* with *words* to *anyone* and *everyone* who still needs to hear. So the only biblical method of evangelism is the *preaching* of the *message* of good news *with words*. The verbal form of the word “Gospel” actually *means* “preach the Gospel,” and it has for its background the picture of a messenger in the Old Testament who was sent to run and announce the good news of victory in battle or the good news of freedom from captivity, or whatever good news it might be. Here are three of the key passages that sum up the biblical teaching on the only right method of evangelism:

- 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.”
- Romans 10:14–15 — 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*]!”
- Ephesians 6:18–20 — [Pray] also for me, that *words* may be given to me in *opening my mouth boldly* to *make known* [*gnorizo*] 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*.

This morning we’re going to look some more at the biblical method of evangelism in light of the content *of* the Gospel, and in light of the only proper response *to* the Gospel. In other words, how does the actual message or content of the Gospel reinforce and help to explain the only proper method of evangelism? And how does the only right *response* to the Gospel also reinforce and help to explain the only proper method of evangelism?

I. The content of the Gospel and what it means for our evangelistic method.

What *is* the Gospel message that people need to hear? It’s amazing how much confusion there can be on a topic so basic and fundamental to Christianity. But we shouldn’t be surprised, since we know that our enemy, the devil, is real. We saw a couple of weeks ago that the Gospel message is summed up in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

- 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 — Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that *Christ died for*

our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

The message that the evangelist proclaims is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus – according to the Scriptures. Now this basic core summary of the message obviously has to assume some other things. Who is this Jesus who died and was resurrected? He is the perfect and holy Son of God. Why did Jesus die? He died for sin – on the cross the holy and innocent Son of God was taking the punishment for guilty lawbreakers like us so that these same guilty lawbreakers might be forgiven and have the perfect obedience of Jesus transferred to their own account.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What is the meaning of Jesus' resurrection? By raising Jesus bodily from the dead, God showed His full acceptance of the sacrifice that Jesus made for sinners. The resurrection of Jesus means that He is the one God appointed to be judge of the living and the dead – to this Jesus we will all one day give an account for our every evil thought, and word, and deed. So we read in Acts:

- Acts 24:24–25 — After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And... [Paul] reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment.
- Acts 10:42 — [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead.
- Acts 17:31 — [God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

What's all this about sin, and guilt, and punishment, and coming judgement? What's all this about the perfect and innocent Son of God being condemned to death in the place of sinners? In the first place, this is authoritative, absolute truth. It's the message that "there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be *saved*." (Acts 4:12) Saved from what? — From eternal judgement, and condemnation, and wrath – which we have all deserved because of our sin.

- John 3:18 — Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Can you see that this is not so much a message to be "shared" as it is a message to be preached, and proclaimed, and declared? Do we share the message of sin and guilt or do we preach and proclaim the message of sin and guilt? Do we share the certainty of coming judgment or do we preach and proclaim the message of coming judgment? Do we share the message of salvation through Jesus name or do we preach and proclaim the message of salvation through Jesus' name? Now none of this means that we shouldn't be gentle, and humble. (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15) We absolutely should be both gentle and humble, and full of love! But what this does mean is that in

all true evangelism there should be a certain boldness, and even a certain authority *because* of the authority and the absolute truth and the infinitely high stakes of our *message*.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is careful to say: “Christ died for our sins *in accordance with the Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day *in accordance with the Scriptures*.” See how Paul is citing the authority of the Scriptures – the authority of the Word of God. In Galatians, Paul is very careful to say that:

- Galatians 1:11–12 — For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

But even though the Gospel Paul preached was *not any man’s Gospel*, notice how he still takes personal *ownership* of this Gospel by referring to it as “*my* gospel” and “*our* Gospel.” (cf. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Cor. 4:3; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:8)

- Romans 2:16 — ...on that day when, according to *my gospel*, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:14 — To this he called you through *our gospel*, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Paul could say that this was *his gospel* in something of a unique way because he had been invested with a special authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. But we can also say that the Gospel is *our* Gospel because it is the message *we* proclaim; and so it’s the authority of *our* message that invests *us* with a certain authority – an authority that shows itself in the biblical *method* of boldly proclaiming and preaching the Gospel. This is the meaning of Jesus’ words to Peter, and through Peter to all of us, in Matthew sixteen:

- Matthew 16:18–19 — You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

It’s an absolute must that we be humble, and full of love in all our evangelism. And it’s also an absolute must that in all true evangelism there should be a certain boldness, and even a certain authority *because* of the authority and the absolute truth-claims of *our message*.

Now I really believe that this simple truth could revolutionize the Church’s evangelism – including my own. I really believe that this simple truth could actually *give* boldness even to those who never thought they could possibly be bold. Why? Because in the end, I would suggest that “sharing” just isn’t very conducive to boldness. For all our attempts to muster up boldness, I wonder if it’s actually our “safe” methods of evangelism that are constantly getting in the way? If “sharing” isn’t conducive to boldness, then I would suggest that an authoritative proclamation of an authoritative Gospel is actually (and paradoxically!) just what we need to help drive away our timidity and our fear!

Nevertheless, *even assuming that we really are full of humility and full of gentleness*, it's still possible that this emphasis on the *authoritative* and *bold proclaiming* of *truth* might still be making us nervous. Is it possible that we really want to sound more "open-minded" and "reasonable"? – In a "good way," of course? I wonder how much of our approach to evangelism has been influenced without our even realizing it by the pluralistic and relativistic culture that we live in? So we suggest and we hint. And we use words like "for me," and "I feel," and "I think." And we talk about "perspectives." And we ask, "What do you think?", and we do "surveys," as if we were really interested in collecting results. Now maybe in some contexts these are completely fine things to say and do. But I still wonder how often we actually compromise the authority and the absolute truth-claims of our message by our unbiblical methods (such as, by "sharing" versus "proclaiming")?

We've seen what the *content* of the Gospel message means for our method of evangelism. Now let's close by considering what the only proper *response* to the Gospel must mean for our evangelistic method.

II. The only proper response to the Gospel and what it means for evangelistic method.

The Gospel is a message about sin, and guilt, and punishment, and coming judgement. The Gospel is a message about the perfect and innocent Son of God being condemned to death in the place of sinners so that these same sinners might be saved from God's wrath, forgiven, and given the free gift of life eternal in the presence of God. And you know what Paul says about this message? Paul says that this message is a "stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." (1 Cor. 1:23) In another place, Paul calls this message the "*offense* of the cross." (Gal. 5:11; cf. Rom. 9:33) The crazy thing about our Gospel is that it's a good news that people want to think they don't need. So when Felix heard Paul reasoning about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, he "was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.'" (Acts 24:25) When the Areopagites heard Paul preaching about the resurrection of Jesus, "some mocked," because they didn't want to believe in coming judgment. (Acts 17:32) When Paul testified to Festus that "the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to [the Jews] and to the Gentiles" Festus tried to calm his guilty conscience by saying to Paul: "You are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." (Acts 26:22-25) When King Agrippa heard the same message, he put Paul off by saying: "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" When the Jewish Counsel heard about Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God as Leader and Savior, they were enraged and wanted to kill Peter and the apostles. (Acts 5:31, 33) Now Paul and Peter didn't do anything wrong to provoke these responses. It was just the nature of their message, **AND** therefore also it's bold and authoritative proclamation. The nature of their message was always reflected in the method of its delivery! But how many of us in our "sharing" of the Gospel are careful to eliminate even the possibility of getting responses like Paul and Peter got? Yes, it's true that we shouldn't provoke these responses through belligerent behavior or any lack of genuine love and concern.

- Acts 26:28–29 — And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

And so what we see is that it was precisely Paul's deep, deep love for the unsaved that warned him away from any method other than boldly and authoritatively proclaiming the Gospel.

We heard some of the negative responses to the offense of the Gospel. But often in Acts, we read of a very different kind of response. When the people in Acts 2 heard the word about the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were "cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37) And do you know how Peter responds? He responds with an imperative – a *command*:

- Acts 2:38 — Peter said to them, "Repent [imperative] and be baptized [imperative] every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is the authority of the Gospel! It's not *simply* an invitation, or something that "wishes well" for others. The good news of the Gospel leads to a command. Look at the example of Jesus' command:

- Mark 1:14–15 — Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent [imperative] and believe [imperative] in the gospel."

To repent and believe are two sides of the same coin. To repent is to *turn away* from our sinful wickedness and self-seeking idolatry and *turn toward* the one true God. To believe is to trust wholly in God's provision of forgiveness and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. And so these are the two imperatives, or commands, of the Gospel. Paul says:

- Acts 17:30 (cf. Acts 26:19–20; 3:19; 14:15) — The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he *commands* all people everywhere to repent.

And when the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas, "What *must* I do to be saved?" they responded with the imperative of the Gospel:

- Acts 16:31 (cf. 10:43; 13:38-39) — Believe [imperative] in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

The Gospel is a *command to all people* everywhere in the world to repent and believe. So listen now to both the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter as they sum up the only right response to the Gospel – which we've already seen to be "Repent and believe":

- 2 Thessalonians 1:8 (cf. Rom. 10:16; Rom. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:12) — The Lord Jesus [will be] revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not *obey the gospel* of our Lord Jesus.
- 1 Peter 4:17 (Heb. 4:6; 1 Peter 2:8; 3:1) — It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not *obey the gospel* of God?

If the Gospel is something to be obeyed, then certainly it is something to be preached, proclaimed, and declared with authority and boldness to any and all who will listen! In our sharing of the Gospel, we can so easily end up putting the unsaved in the “driver’s seat.” “Are you ready now?” “Will you accept Jesus’ invitation?” “Will you open the door when Jesus is knocking?” But biblical evangelism acknowledges that God is always in the “driver’s seat” as He Himself comes to us in the Gospel, commanding us to repent and believe, and promising life to all who obey. Luke describes the blessing of God on this proclamation of the Gospel in Acts chapter six:

- Acts 6:7 — And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became **obedient** to the faith.

Now once again, I really believe that these simple truths could revolutionize the Church’s evangelism – including my own. I really believe that these simple truths could actually *give* boldness even to those who never thought they could possibly be bold. Because now we understand that none of us are called to be “salesmen.” I am definitely **not** a salesman! None of us are called to perform complicated conversational maneuvers. We’re not trying to get people to agree with us, we’re simply exhorting and urging people in all love and sincerity to obey the Gospel. If “sharing” isn’t conducive to boldness, then I would suggest that an authoritative proclamation of an authoritative Gospel is actually (and paradoxically!) just what we need to help drive away our timidity and our fear!

Conclusion

For all our emphasis today on relationships (relationship evangelism), I simply don’t see this *emphasis* anywhere in the Bible. Now please hear me out! God undoubtedly uses relationships with our unsaved neighbors and co-workers and family as wonderful “open doors” to proclaim the Gospel. (cf. Col. 4:3; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12) But there isn’t even the slightest hint in the Bible that the Church’s evangelism should be limited to the context of our existing relationships and acquaintances. It seems that Paul reserved almost *all* of his “relational energy” for discipling, and strengthening, and encouraging the Christians after they had already believed the Gospel. (1 Thess. 2:7-12)

What we’ve seen today is that we don’t need to “earn the right” to evangelize. We *automatically* have that right because of the universal authority and truth of the Gospel we proclaim and the nature of the Gospel as a **command to everyone** to repent and believe in **obedience** to that Gospel. And so both the content *of* the Gospel and the only proper response *to* the Gospel show us again that in all true evangelism there should be a certain boldness, and even a certain authority as we preach, and proclaim, and declare the message of the Gospel.

It’s certainly possible to preach and proclaim in the context of an informal, friendly conversation. This is where most all of our proclaiming will happen. We aren’t called to badger, or try and force the Gospel down people’s throats. Neither is there’s any command to proclaim the Gospel in every single conversation or be evangelizing 24/7. And yet I’m convicted that as a church, we

may be doing far too much waiting around for “opportunities,” when in some sense, the opportunities are already numerous and all around us.

What does the authority of our message and the only right response to our message imply about our responsibility *as a church* to the community of Morris? What about our responsibility as messengers to our unsaved friends and neighbors, and acquaintances? Stripped down, unadulterated, 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?

“*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.” 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 this simple “logic” of the Gospel.