

Where Do We Begin?

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[0:00] Last week, let's do a little review. Last week we said that evangelism begins where?! With God, with the Trinity.! God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit are all glorious.

They're infinitely happy, infinitely satisfied with themselves. And each member of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are bursting with love and affection and desire and delight in the other persons of the Trinity.

They're this overflowing spring of desire, delight, and glory. And that overflowing spring that is the Trinity, it spills over.

And it spills over into creation and into redemption. It spills over in a desire to spread their glory. And that was a key word that we talked about last week.

Spreading their glory, spreading God's glory. They don't make worshipers because they lack praise. They don't make worshipers because they need people to make them feel good.

[1:08] Because God already is infinitely satisfied with himself. They make worshipers because his glory, God's glory, is, as it were, too much to keep to himself.

He has to spread it to others because it is such good news and glory and delightful. So God does everything that he does so that others can see and enjoy and understand the majesty of God.

Remember we said last week, what is the chief end of God? It's to glorify God and enjoy him forever. It's the same chief end that we have.

So let's look at this in a different way. This is all still review, but let's look at it a different way than we looked at it last week. Sometimes we use the word magnify as a synonym for glorify.

We say, Lord, I magnify your name. And when we say that, we mean, Lord, I glorify your name. Well, there's two ways to magnify something, isn't there?

[2:17] I have a microscope. And a microscope magnifies things. So I take a swab and I swab the inside of my cheek and I put my cheek cells, what I find in my mouth, and I put it under the slide and I look at it, and there are my cells all lined up like little bricks.

And I say, wow, that's really neat. That is, that's wonderful. I didn't have any idea that that's what my cheek cells look like. Is that what we mean when we say, Lord, I magnify your name?

Lord, I'm going to make something that is small and make it look bigger than what it is so I can enjoy it. Are we saying, Lord, you are small and I'm going to make you look bigger than what you are?

That's not what we mean at all, is it? Well, there's another instrument. You have the microscope that magnifies things and you have a telescope. A telescope magnifies things.

So we go outside and it's dark outside and we point our telescope at this little red blob in the sky that's Jupiter. And all of a sudden, Jupiter gets into focus.

[3:28] And so instead of a blurry red dot, we see a planet with stripes around it and a red dot. And even if we have a good microscope, we can see moons, several moons going around Jupiter.

And we say, kids, you got to look at this. This is awesome. You have to see this. Or we call our neighbors over and say, hey, come over here. Look at this. You have to check this out.

That is what we mean when we say, Lord, I magnify your name. I glorify you. Everything God does is to bring something that is already great into focus so that we can see it and enjoy it.

Jupiter is huge and vast. And we need some way of bringing it up close so we can see it. And that is a telescope. Well, the Lord has his own telescopes.

And his biggest telescope of all, where we could see God's glory, is the cross. That is God's great telescope. And he uses the cross to bring into focus how great he is.

[4:41] So something that we couldn't see very well before, the cross brings it close to us. It is at the cross, when Jesus dies in the place of sinners, that we see God's glory shining the brightest.

And we talked about that last week. That at the cross, we see his love, and we see his justice, and his holiness, and his mercy. We see his greatness and his humility all at the same time in the cross. So God's evangelistic efforts, his efforts to spread his glory and majesty, are centered at the cross. It's at the cross where we, as sinners, it's where all sinners get the best and the greatest look at his glory.

So, we said last week, evangelism, therefore, is first and foremost telling others about God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Evangelism is bringing sinners into contact with Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection so that they can see God's glory.

[5:55] It's bringing Christ into focus. And the goal, then, of evangelism is to bring sinners to the place where they will forsake their idols and start worshiping God.

That is what we're after in evangelism. And that is what we thought about last week. That's an extended review. But before we move on, I want to ask you, are there any questions about that material?

Was that helpful? Was that confusing? Do you have any comments about that material? Okay.

Well, this week, we're going to ask another question.

And that is, where do we begin with evangelism? We said last week, where does evangelism begin? It begins with the Trinity. This week, we're switching the question a little bit and we're asking, where do we begin with evangelism?

Well, evangelism is like a woodshop project. You guys were in woodshop, maybe, in high school. And before you can start working on the project, you have to know what you're going to make.

[7:01] Isn't that true? So in eighth grade, I did a woodshop project where I made a lamp. And in order to make my lamp, according to the specifications that my teacher gave me, I had to have three pieces of flat wood, like this long, about 16 inches.

I had to have one square flat piece of wood, about six inches, and another one about three inches or three and a half. And I had to have those pieces. I had to make those pieces before I could make my lamp.

The lamp decided what I needed before I could begin. The lamp decided where I needed to begin.

If I was making a Chinese checkerboard, it would be different than if I was making a lamp.

But I'm making a lamp, so that decides what I need to do to begin. Let me ask you, what are we trying to make in evangelism?

What are we trying to make in evangelism? Disciples. Okay? Go one step further. Worshipers.

[8:08] That's what God is after, isn't it? Worshipers. And the only worshipers are disciples who obey God. If you love me, you will obey my commands. When God sets out to do evangelism, we saw last week that what he is after, what he's trying to make, are worshipers.

And what Jesus Christ did when he came to this earth was his whole mission was set around this one idea of we are going to make worshipers. If we're going to have worshipers, they need to be saved.

And that is the thrust of Jesus' mission. But the end is not just that we're saved, but that we will worship God. Well, Jesus showed us that. Turn in your Bibles to John chapter 4.

John chapter 4. And we're just going to pick out a few things from this very familiar passage that just shows us what Jesus was after.

John chapter 4. And just notice, first of all, verse 4. John 4, 4. Now, he had to go through Samaria.

[9:20] He had to go through Samaria. Now, you've heard all of this before, but let's remind ourselves. Did Jesus have to go through Samaria geographically?

No. Now, there's other ways to get where he was going, which was Galilee. Jesus didn't need to go geographically through Samaria. Most Jews hopped over the Jordan River.

If you're looking at the map, they hopped over the Jordan River. They went north, and then they hopped back over. So they didn't have to go through the land of Samaria. That was the well-worn road.

That was the way the Jews went. But Jesus had to go to Samaria. Why? Because he was after not just arriving in Galilee.

He was after making worshipers. And the way to make worshipers was in Samaria. He had to go through Samaria. So let's look at verse 23.

[10:21] All of what Jesus has said is leading up to verse 23, really. Yet a time is coming. You remember he met the Samaritan woman, and they had the discussion.

And he's telling her now. 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 that the Father seeks. The whole point of everything that Jesus has said up to this point to that woman in Samaria was to bring her to the point where she was ready to worship God.

And so Jesus confronts her with her sin, with her idolatry. He says, go, call your husband, and come back. And she says, I don't have a husband.

And he says, that's right. You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now, he's not your husband. He confronts her sin, her idolatry. And before that, he offers her the good news.

[11:21] She's been drinking out of wells that don't satisfy. And so in verse 10, he says this. Look at verse 10. If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.

Jesus Christ is this living water. And he wants her to experience that. He wants her to drink deep of Jesus Christ.

He wants her to drink deep of himself out of the satisfaction of her heart to worship God instead of men. Worshipers are what Jesus is after in evangelism.

Worshippers are what God is after in evangelism. And that is what we are trying to make. That is our woodshot project, if you will, for evangelism. We want to make worshipers.

Remember, evangelism is us joining God in his mission on this earth. That's what evangelism is. And that's going to have all sorts of implications.

[12:28] And we're going to talk about all those sorts of implications later on. But let's now, just for the moment, ask, if that's what we're seeking, remember our big question, where do we begin?

That's our project. So where do we begin? We begin to do evangelism with prayer. With prayer. And let me ask you, why do we have to begin with prayer?

What are some of the reasons? There's lots of reasons. But why do we need to begin evangelism with prayer? We are trying to do something in making worshipers that we can't do.

We don't have the ability to do what we're trying to do. We're trying to make worshipers, but we can't do it. We're seeking a transformation of a heart.

That Samaritan woman was in love with the affections of men. And there was nothing anyone could do besides God to break her from that idol.

[13:29] So we're seeking a transformation of a heart from a hard, stony heart to a heart of flesh that loves God. And so from the very beginning of evangelism, we are shut up to God.

We don't have any alternatives but God. We don't have any resources in ourselves to accomplish what we're trying to accomplish. If there's going to be any success in evangelism, then we must pray.

Unless God shines into a person's heart, then the darkness will stay there. And so we pray. God, you shined your light into Lydia's heart.

And you opened up her heart and she believed. Father, will you open this woman's heart, this man's heart, my friend's heart. Father, the evangelism effort, the project, begins with prayer.

Well, why else do we need to pray if we're going to evangelize successfully? There's lots of reasons. We need wisdom. We need courage.

[14:37] But we need wisdom, too. We need wisdom too. We often, the biggest problem that we face a lot of times in evangelism is that we're afraid. Isn't that true?

We're afraid of them. And so we pray for courage. And we're going to talk about that in a second.

But we need wisdom as well. at the height of the Battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War, General Lee and his forces were on one ridge.

It was called Seminary Ridge. And on the other side of the field were the Union forces, and they were on Cemetery Ridge. And General Lee sent out his men to charge the Union position on Cemetery Ridge.

And one of the commanders in charge of that charge was General George Pickett. And Pickett's charge is famous for two things. One, it was incredibly courageous.

And two, it was incredibly foolish. The Confederates were stationed on Seminary Ridge, and at the signal they left their positions and charged full bore into the Union forces.

[15:50] And it was a bloodbath. And when the Confederate soldiers came back, when they straggled back from the charge, Lee ordered Pickett to regroup his division.

And Pickett said to Lee, General Lee, I don't have a division left. His men were completely wiped out. It was incredibly courageous and incredibly foolish.

And we want to be courageous. So we're going to talk about that. We need to pray for courage, but we need to pray for wisdom. We want to charge in there, and we want to fight and win and get in the faces of people.

But we don't want to be foolish. We want to put our finger on what we need to do. We want to put our finger on the exact sin that's really an issue. We want to be able to understand what that person is thinking.

And for that, we need wisdom. We need wisdom to learn to be quiet. When you're learning to sell, what is the first thing they tell you to do after you've made your sales pitch?

[16:58] No one in sales here? You shut up. You be quiet. Because more sales are lost when you open your mouth afterwards than at any other time.

Half of wisdom is knowing when to be quiet. And we need that kind of wisdom. The kind of wisdom that knows what to say and when to say it, and then the kind of wisdom that knows when to be quiet.

James 1.5, where are we going to get this wisdom? Well, if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault.

We begin with prayer because we need wisdom. I've mentioned courage. Like I said, the fear of man is what keeps us from a lot of evangelism.

We need courage. Do you know who's struggled with fear? The Apostle Paul. And someone might say, I don't know about that.

[18:01] Come on. He was beaten. He was bitten by a snake, which to me is probably one of the worst things. He was put in front of the emperor and made to testify in front of all these people.

He was courageous. I mean, he got stoned and he got up and went to the next city. Paul wasn't afraid, right? Ephesians 6. He wrote this to the Ephesians.

Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains.

Pray that I may declare it fearlessly as I should. He is asking for words to be given. Why? Why? Because he's a guy just like us.

He's a guy just like you. He knew what it was to have sweaty hands and the butterflies in the stomach and afraid of rejection and afraid of what these people are going to say.

[18:59] He knew that fear. And so he said, pray. Pray for me. The reason we are afraid is because we don't pray.

The reason we are afraid is we don't pray. But Paul said, pray for me so that I won't be afraid, that I can speak fearlessly. Isn't that what the apostles prayed for?

Lord, give us boldness. Boldness is not a natural thing that we find in ourselves, but we pray for it and God gives it. Well, why else do we need to pray?

We need opportunities. We need opportunities to evangelize. We're not in control of this world and we're not in control of people, but God is.

And we need to pray for open doors. In the big scheme of things, there are opportunities galore. So we don't need to pray, oh God, give me those kind of opportunities.

[20:01] When you look into the town of Bremen, when you look into the city of South Bend or the town of Plymouth, what do you see? Do you see a barren wasteland or a dry, dusty desert?

Jesus said, no. What you see are fields white unto harvest. We need to have our eyes opened. To us, they are barren wasteland.

But when God looks at things, it's fields white unto harvest. And we need to stick our sickle into the field and then we'll begin harvesting. We don't need opportunities in the big scheme of things, but we do need opportunities with individual people.

With certain individuals, don't we? There are people that are hard to get into. They have walls and they have armor and they're hard to get into. And maybe we've worked with them for so long that now if we say, hey, you're a sinner and you need to see Jesus, that would be like picking up a shovel and hitting them across the face.

It wouldn't work. There's walls. Well, how do we get inside the walls? We pray for open doors. We pray for clear opportunities into their hearts.

[21:21] God is sovereign. He loves to answer prayer, right? He wants to spread his glory. Right? And so what do we do? We pray. God, spread your glory into my friend's heart.

Give me an opportunity to speak to them. Give me something clear where I can go in. Now, I'm not saying there's not a time to actually get out your tools and cut out a door where there is no door. That's one issue.

But we don't cut doors all the time. You work with what you are given. And so we pray, God, break down this wall. Cut a door into this person's heart. And so we pray for specific opportunities.

Well, we begin with prayer. Prayer. Because that person that we're seeking to spread God's glory to, they need heart work done that we can't do.

And we begin with prayer because I need heart work done that I can't bring about in my own power. So we pray. We will never know successful evangelism until we actually start praying for ourselves and for people.

[22:32] And so we can sit here and we can say, yes, I want to evangelize. But if it doesn't lead to prayer, it's not going to get off the launch pad. Well, what are we trying to do in evangelism?

We're trying to spread God's glory. We want to make worshipers. We want to see others. We want others to see God's glory in the person of Jesus Christ.

And so we pray. And then what? Then what? Well, after prayer, not temporally, you don't pray and then you do this step. You're praying all the time.

But after prayer, not temporally, but logically, comes the next point. And that's live a visible life. Live a visible life. A visible life.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5. These are very familiar verses. But we need to come back to them.

[23:35] We need to reconsider them. Dennis, can you read verses 13 through 16 of chapter 5? Let me ask you a question. It's not a trick question.

Can you mistake light for anything other than light? Can you? No. You don't go into a bedroom, a dark bedroom, and flip the switch and say, huh, is that light or is that darkness?

Light is obviously light. You cannot mistake it for what it is. Can you mistake saltiness for anything else? No.

No. You don't lick a popsicle. So you have your favorite creamsicle popsicle and say, hmm, this is so tasty. This is very salty. You don't say that. You don't eat french fries from McDonald's and say, hmm, this tastes like candy.

You don't. Because saltiness is obvious. It's unmistakable. Salt and light are clear as day. They're as obvious as can be. So it's a dark and stormy night.

[24:37] The electricity goes out, and you rummage around in your cupboards, and you pull out flashlights and candles and whatever else, and you light them, and you put them around the dark rooms so that the people walking in darkness can see the light.

Jesus says, we are those candles. The lost are the people walking around in darkness. So what do we do? We put ourselves, we put our candles in obvious, clear, wide-open places so that the people in darkness can see.

We live a visible life. We don't hide it under a bushel. Is that arrogant? I'm the light of the world? Isn't that arrogant? No, it's what Jesus says about us.

Jesus says, you're the light of the world, so shine. But you say, maybe, someone says, but it's dark and they're scary. Yeah. So you shine.

You're the salt of the world, and so you rub up to the rotting meat. But you say, but they smell bad. They're disgusting. Jesus says, yes.

[25:55] And you are the salt that is going to preserve them and give them grace. Is that arrogant? No. It would be if it was our light, and it would be if it was my grace, but it's not.

It's Jesus shining through me. It's God giving grace through me. So Jesus is saying, shine with the grace that I've given to you. We're the flashlights that Jesus shines through.

You take the batteries out of the flashlight, and there's no light. Jesus is the battery of us shining into the world. He provides the power. He provides the grace that shines through us.

So what do you do? What do you do if you want others to see God's glory? Well, you live a visible life. You live a life that shines out to others.

You rub up to people. You get to know them. You let God's glory and His grace shine through you. So you talk to your neighbors. You be friends with your neighbors.

[27:03] You get to know their problems. You get to know what they're afraid of. And you be friends with your lost coworkers. And someone might say, well, I'm friendly enough.

Isn't that good enough? No. There's a difference between being friendly with someone and being their friends. Be friends with them. I recently heard a very interesting sermon on hospitality and a lot of evangelism things.

But he talked about, the preacher talked about, how we as humans naturally organize our relationships. This is true, it seems, everywhere in every culture. That we have two sets of people in our lives.

We have acquaintances and we have friends. Now, the way he uses the word acquaintance is not the way we normally use it. Just sort of like people that we run into every now and then.

Acquaintances are anyone that we just see in one setting. So these are the people that you work with every day. These are acquaintances.

[28:07] But you only deal with them in this one situation of work. So you only work with them. You never do anything else with them. He says, you will be acquaintances forever.

So for five years, I worked in a lumberyard with two or three or four guys at the most. And we worked long hours. We were together all the time. But you know what?

Since I've left, I've talked to a few of those people on Facebook one time. And that's it. The supposed friendship is over.

Well, why? I mean, there might be lots of reasons. But the basic reason is I never really was friends with them. I never invited them to my house.

And they never became a part of that situation. I never went out with them after work. I was never there in two different situations.

[29:04] And so for five years, I was really good acquaintances with a few guys. And I never got very far in telling them the gospel. I would tell them the gospel, but it didn't do any good.

I invited them to church, and they never came. Sometimes they said they would come. And I weighed out, and they didn't. Why? Well, we weren't friends, really.

We were just people living together for a while. Well, friends share more than work. Friends are people that have become a part of your life.

They're a part of your life in more than one way. So we feel open to talk to our friends. And that's what we need to see. That's what we need to be.

We want outsiders to feel like we're their friends. And we want to truly be their friends. And that's going to provide all sorts of dangers. But that is where the opportunities are.

[30:06] We have to be willing. We want them to be willing to open up to us and tell us what they're thinking, what they're really afraid of. Because only when we have that information will we be able to shape our gospel message.

And I'm not saying you change the gospel message, but you shape the way you present it to meet what they're saying, where they're at. So how do you get to that point? Well, if you could believe it, you basically take them into another situation with you.

If you always work together, you invite them to their house or to your house. You go out with them. If you go to school with them, you have them in your family, in your house.

You've got to get them into a second setting. And what this pastor said is that for some reason, people just sort of automatically reset the relationship. It goes from acquaintance to friendship.

And they start thinking, you know what? This person really does care for me. This person really is interested in me. And so people are dying out there in the world because no one cares about them.

[31:15] We stay in our houses. We go to work. We're in our cars all by ourselves. And all the time, people are alone. And so we be friends with people and so that we can open up to one another and the gospel will come forth naturally.

And what will that mean? It's going to mean hospitality. You're going to have to get those people into your house. Hospitality is not something that we just do on Sunday afternoon.

It's not something that we just do with our friends and our family. Jesus made it clear. You show hospitality to those who won't return it, who can't return it. They're lost.

So get those fellow workers into your home if you want to have good opportunities to talk to them. If there's a hardness in their heart towards the gospel, then invite them over.

Invite them over for pizza and a movie. Get to know them a little bit. And things are going to start to flow. Opportunities will start to happen. You're going to find chinks in the armor.

[32:17] And so let them see you with your wife and with your husband. Let them see you with your kids and how you relate. That's how you live a visible life. That's one way.

You develop friendships with the lost. Well, you live a visible life, and that means you're going to be involved with people. We're called to live before men.

So how can we find ways to live before men? Our culture, like I just said, is so boxed up. It's so self-contained. It's so lonely. We don't visit our neighbors.

We don't carpool. We buy cars. So each one of us has just me in the car. And we go to our job, and we come right back, and we're miserable. People are miserable and lonely.

Well, how can we involve ourselves with people? Go to the same restaurants again and again, and go for the same waitress, and smile, and be kind to her. Let her know that you care, and try to be friendly and open with her.

[33:15] Invite your neighbors over for dinner. They're sitting at home doing the same thing you're doing, which is hardly anything. And so invite them over, and talk to them, and get to know them, involve them, live before them.

Live before them, and let your light shine. And so you say hi to the joggers that you see jogging, because you never know when you might see that person in another setting.

You go to the high school games. You sit next to strangers. You let your light shine. Jesus wants us to live before men.

And we all lean, as Christians, we all lean towards trying to secure ourselves by surrounding ourselves with Christian friends and Christian culture.

And we think that is the way we protect ourselves from the world. We just surround ourselves with all these Christian things, and so we never get out and live before men.

[34:15] Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. The visible life is a life that is meant to lead sinners to worship.

So if you're going to spread God's glory, you have to live this visible life. So if we're not living before men, then they're not going to see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

They're never going to see and experience the power of the gospel in someone's life unless we open up to them. So too often, we take Jesus' warnings about, don't do your fasting in front of men, don't do your praying in front of men, don't do your giving in front of men.

That's sort of, that's the final word. That's the ultimate outlook for our good deeds. That's not what he meant. He said, you don't do those things to get praise from them.

You don't do those things to get praise from men. You don't do good deeds to have them worship you. You do those good deeds before men so that they will worship your Father in heaven.

[35:22] It's all a matter of what you're going for. If you're going so that they will see you and worship God, then do your good deeds before men and let them praise your Father in heaven.

Well, the visible life, it's a righteous life. It's a righteous life. We want Jesus to shine and that means we must live godly lives as Jesus did in front of people.

One of the glories of Jesus Christ is that he takes sinners that are in love with sin and he changes them and he makes them righteous. He makes them truly holy. And so before Jesus said, you are the light of the world, what came before it?

The Beatitudes. And what came after that? You're the light of the world. Well, he showed what does it mean to live a law-abiding life?

What does it mean to live a righteous life? Those things all go together. Righteousness and all the Beatitudes are part of the meaning of what it means to live a visible life.

[36:23] We don't want to live a sinfully visible life. We want to live a holy life. Does that mean we have to be perfect? Does that mean we never show people our flaws?

Certainly not. It's one of the good things, one of the good things, very few of them, of this postmodern world that you're living in. They do not, they don't have any patience for hypocrites. They love their flawed heroes because that's real. They don't want to see you acting like a holier-than-thou do-gooder that never messes up.

So true shining as a light is not perfection. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Part of shining as a light, of living a visible life, is being righteous, but it's not only that, it's being humble to admit your faults.

And that means when you mess up in front of people, you confess it. And that's part of your light. When you sin, you repent. You don't cherish your outward appearance of righteousness to the point where you stop shining, where you are arrogant and proud.

[37:42] You live humbly before them. And so, to live visibly in front of people is to live righteously, but humbly. You're not going to accomplish perfection.

So you don't wait for that. Well, our lives are the foundation of our words. They're the foundation of our words. And we're going to talk about our words in the coming weeks.

But we want to see what has to happen before we speak. We have to pray. We have to be in the constant state of prayer and we have to live a visible life.

We can't have one without the other. Our lives and our words, they both have to be aimed at spreading God's glory to unbelievers. So what do we see today?

Evangelism begins with prayer and it's the foundation of a visible life. It has its foundation in a visible life of humility before men. And so, may God give us grace to do those things, to start praying, and to live before men, to be visible so that they can see God's grace and mercy shining through us.

[38:53] We're dismissed.