

Following Jesus Requires Evangelism

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[0 : 00] So I remember the first time I read *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. It didn't end the way I expected. You see, I thought it would end with Christian reaching the celestial city, entering into the presence of the king, and rejoicing forevermore.

Now all of that does happen, but that's technically not how the story ends. By the way, if you haven't had a chance to read the book over the last 375 years, well, spoiler alert, before Christian reaches the celestial city, he meets a man by the name of Ignorance, and they have a long conversation about Ignorance's spiritual condition.

And some people might find that conversation a little strange. They might even find it upsetting. Because Ignorance confidently believes he will be let into the celestial city.

And he doesn't hesitate to tell Christian so, but Christian doesn't think that's the case. And he doesn't hesitate to tell Ignorance.

For the better part of an entire chapter, Christian and his traveling companion, Faithful, are essentially trying to convince Ignorance that he's not saved.

[1 : 28] They don't believe the king will let him in. Now, that all seems very strange and perhaps upsetting, because it's a far cry from how we typically approach things in our day.

We would rather assume people are saved. I remember needing to overcome this way of thinking when I lived in the Bible Belt of the South. You see, in the Bible Belt, nearly everyone says they're a Christian.

Their parents were Christians. Their grandparents were Christians. They don't cheat on their taxes. They're upstanding citizens. They raise their kids to know ethically right from wrong.

They vote for pro-life candidates. They know all the words to *Amazing Grace* and *Psalm 23*. They may not belong to a church or read their Bibles or pray or show any fruit of life, but you better not question whether they know the Lord or will be in heaven one day.

This has been my experience through the funeral home as well. Every time I'm asked to preach a funeral, I speak to the family, and I find out as much as I can about their loved one, and I bet if I were to go back over my notes from every funeral I've done over the past seven or so years, I would see the same phrase in my notes over and over again.

[2 : 51] He or she was spiritual but not religious. And I'll tell you what that means. At least what I have come to know it means.

It means that their loved one had very vague beliefs about God, or at least a God, but that belief didn't change anything. Their lives would have been pretty much the same had they not believed in God.

In our day, the last thing we're supposed to do is question whether someone will be in heaven. So the conversation between Christian and Ignorance can feel a little unsettling.

But then we come to the end of the story. Again, it doesn't end with Christian entering the celestial city. In fact, I'll read the end to you. Bunyan writes, Now while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head back to look and saw Ignorance approach the riverside.

That's the river of death. But he soon crossed over without half the difficulty the other two men had. For it happened that at that time there was a ferryman called Vainhope, who helped him over with his boat.

[4 : 04] So Ignorance, as I saw the others do, ascended the hill to reach the gate. Only he came alone, and there were no men to meet him with the slightest encouragement. When he arrived at the gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly given to him.

But he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, From where have you come, and what do you want? He answered, I have eaten and drank in the presence of the king, and he has taught in our streets.

Then they asked him for his certificate, so that they might take it in and show it to the king. So he fumbled in his pocket for one, but found none. Then they said, Do you not have one?

But the man solemnly shook his head. So they told the king, But he would not come down to see him. Instead, he commanded the two shining ones that had guided Christian and hopeful to the city to go out and take ignorance, bind him hand and foot, and take him away.

Then they took him up, carried him through the air to the door I saw on the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a path to hell, even from the gate of heaven, as well as from the city of destruction.

[5 : 26] The end. Like I said, that's kind of a surprise ending. Why in the world would Bunyan end the story that way?

Well, I think he has a good reason. If he had ended the story on a high note, you know, with Christian entering the celestial city, perhaps most of his readers would have seen themselves in Christian.

They would have thought, that's what I have to look forward to. That's my destiny. But by ending the story with ignorance, rejected at the gate, Bunyan is encouraging everyone to do what the apostle Paul said we should do in 2 Corinthians 13.

Paul said, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. We're talking about eternal life versus an eternity in hell.

This is not something to be taken lightly. Which is why John Bunyan, and it's why the apostle Paul want us to examine ourselves. The last thing we should do is assume that we're bound for heaven when we bear no evidence of that in our lives.

[6 : 43] And the last thing we should do is agree with others who say they're bound for heaven when they show no evidence in their lives. Instead, we should implore them to examine themselves.

But let me back up. Let me read two passages that will kind of frame everything else I'll say. The first is found in Matthew 7. In verses 13 and 14, Jesus says, Enter by the narrow gate.

For the gate is wide, and the way is easy, that leads to destruction. And those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who enter it are few. So the first point I'll make is that most people, most people are on a road that doesn't lead to life.

They are traveling a path that leads to utter destruction.

Our default destination is not heaven. And evidently, whatever it takes to get into heaven is not something most people are finding. In other words, Jesus says, Universalism, where everyone goes to heaven, is completely false.

[8 : 05] In fact, the idea that most people go to heaven is false. Now let me read the second passage. This one is found in John chapter 4.

John 4 tells the story of Jesus and his disciples passing through the region of Samaria. The Samaritan people, if you will, were a mix of Jews and Gentiles.

In the past, these two groups had intermarried, had children, and essentially combined their religions and cultures. So the true Jews of Israel and Judea, they detested the Samaritans.

In most cases, they would travel all the way around the region rather than passing through it as Jesus did. They wanted nothing to do with the Samaritans, primarily because they perverted God's religion.

But Jesus, he not only travels into Samaria, but while he's there, he engages a Samaritan woman in meaningful conversation.

[9 : 14] And this is to the dismay of his disciples. They don't say it out loud, but they're all thinking the same thing. What is he doing talking to this woman? Now here's what happens.

Jesus reveals his true identity to this woman. He shows her that he is God's Messiah, and she runs into town to tell others about it. Verse 39 says, many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.

So what is Jesus doing here? He's evangelizing. He's converting and saving the Samaritans.

Meanwhile, the disciples are perplexed. Sure, they were called to be fishers of men, but a Samaritan woman? Really? Really? Perhaps preaching the gospel to God's covenant people, the Jews, that's one thing.

Preaching it to Samaritans and Gentiles, that's another thing altogether. But listen to what Jesus says to them. He says, Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest. [10:28] Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, one sows and another reaps.

I sent you to reap for that which you did not labor, others have labored, and you have entered into their labor. So here's the second point I want to make. The first is that most people in this world are not saved.

Most people are on the path to destruction. My second point is that those same people are ready to be harvested, if you will.

They are ready to be plucked off the path that leads to destruction and planted on the path that leads to life. Jesus says, Lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

They are ripe. They are ready. Look at them. Millions of people are marching toward a cliff and Jesus tells His disciples, You can be instrumental in saving them.

[11:31] Don't let them walk off the cliff without trying to intervene. And to be clear, this is not something Jesus says exclusively to His first disciples.

disciples. To be a follower of Christ is to be a fisher of men. It is to be a disciple maker. Put another way, following Jesus requires evangelism.

It requires that we love people enough to warn them about the wrath to come and share with them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now I say that because number one, that's the example Jesus gave us. We see that in John chapter 4 among many other places. And number two, that's precisely what Jesus taught His disciples to do.

And again, we see that in John chapter 4. Jesus set the example with the Samaritan woman and then He explicitly taught His disciples to have the same mindset, to do the same thing.

[12:38] In fact, make disciples is, as you know, basically the last command Jesus gave His followers before He ascends into heaven. In Matthew 28, He says, all authority is given in heaven, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you to the end of the age. Now occasionally, you may come across someone who says this command, this great commission in Matthew 28 was meant only for the apostles.

They'll say He wasn't speaking to the entire church throughout history. Instead, they say He was speaking only to the apostles. Well, that's problematic for several reasons, but notice what Christ says in that passage.

He says, go therefore and make disciples. So that's the command. That's the imperative. Then He says, and behold, I am with you always to the end of the age.

[13:48] The King James Version says, unto the end of the earth. Jesus is talking about the age or the era of the church. this is an age that will not end until the world ends.

This is an age that will continue on until we reach what Jesus refers to elsewhere as the age to come. There's this age and then there's the age to come.

Well, the last apostle died many, many years ago, so who's left to carry out this great commission? Who's left to evangelize the nations? Well, that would be the church, of course.

In John 17, Jesus prays for His disciples. Speaking to His Heavenly Father, He says, Sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake, I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth.

[14:52] I do not ask for these only. But also for those who will believe in me through their word. That they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you.

That they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. So Jesus prays for His apostles as He sends them out into the world to preach the gospel, to make disciples.

But you'll notice He extends that prayer to every believer. Every believer who will come after them. He prays that every believer would also have a sanctifying presence in this world.

That is, as they are set apart through their faith in the truth of the gospel, He prays that others will believe it as well. So He starts with the apostles and extends to all believers who would come after

them and, God willing, many more will believe as a result.

as one pastor said, you are a Christian because somebody cared. Now it's your turn. I like that.

[16:04] Countless people all around us are lost walking that path that leads to destruction. And the Lord has called each of us to love them, to warn them, and to point them to Christ.

If we, as His followers, have the mind of Christ, we will care enough about them to intervene before they reach the cliff. We will do the often uncomfortable task of confronting them with their sinfulness and showing them the way of salvation.

You know, I often think of Jesus standing outside of Jerusalem as He visits on that last week of His life. Luke tells us when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it.

Why did He weep? Well, their rejection of Him broke His heart. He said, would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace.

He was heartbroken because it had become too late for them. He said, for the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you.

[17:27] And they will not leave one stone upon another in you because you did not know the time of your visitation. the Messiah had come to them but they refused to believe and now it was too late and this broke our Savior's heart.

He wept over it. You may remember what God said through His prophet Ezekiel. He said, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked would turn from His way and live.

The judgment against the wicked may be just, it may be right, it may be perfectly fair but God has no pleasure in it. His pleasure is in seeing the wicked turn from His way and live.

Jesus said, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 just persons who have no need of repentance. Now I know evangelism can be a very, let's say, uncomfortable thing for many of us.

But I can't think of a better reason to be uncomfortable than the saving of souls. Think of what Paul said regarding the people of Israel.

[18:47] In Romans 9.3 he said, for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.

That's the kind of love and concern we ought to have for people. Now Paul knew he could not be cut off from Christ. In fact, he just finished saying in the previous chapter, nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But he loves his brothers in Israel so much that he expresses a willingness to sacrifice himself, to sacrifice his eternal life to save them.

That's the kind of love we ought to have. Never mind comfort. Never mind whatever fears we hold on to.

There's just too much at stake. Not only are we talking about people's souls, but we evangelize for the glory of God. Not to mention his pleasure and his joy and let's not forget what Jesus said in John chapter 4.

[19:58] Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. We do it for our joy as well.

So, following Jesus requires evangelism. And though I've already touched on some of these, let's talk about the why, the what, the who, and the how of evangelism.

If you will, go with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 9. 1 Corinthians chapter 9. In this chapter, Paul is defending his rights as an apostle, as a minister of the gospel.

He has the right to get married, for instance. He has the right to be financially supported by the church. Yet, he explains that he has not taken advantage of these rights.

He did not get married. He was not accepting money from the church, at least for himself. Why? It's because there can be things more important than taking full advantage of our Christian liberties.

[21:12] That was the topic of chapter 8. Regarding food offered to idols, he told the church that they have the liberty to eat these foods. But he says, take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

Just because you have the liberty to do something doesn't mean you should. So in chapter 9, he says, he has all of these rights as a minister, but he hasn't taken advantage of them.

Why? Well, in this case, it comes down to what he says in verse 19. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

In other words, his mission was to preach the gospel and win people to Christ. That word win could also be translated into gain. That was his God-ordained purpose.

Win people to Christ. Gain people for Christ. And he was willing to sacrifice anything and everything he felt was necessary to accomplish it. Now, I don't know whether he ever had a desire to get married, but if he did, he chose not to.

[22 : 24] For the sake of his mission, for the sake of those souls, he hoped to win to Christ. For the same reason, he didn't take their financial support. He didn't want to come across as maybe a charlatan who was just doing it for the money.

He never lost sight of his mission. Win people to Christ. So let me read this.

I'll start at verse 15. So I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision.

For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me.

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. For I do this of my own will, I have a reward. But if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship.

[23 : 21] What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

To the Jews I became as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law though not being myself under the law that I might win those under the law.

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak that I might win the weak.

I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share with them in its blessings.

So, using Paul as an example, let's talk about, first of all, the why of evangelism. Now, I've covered this already, but what specifically does Paul say here?

[24 : 31] Why does he preach the gospel? Why does he evangelize? Well, look again at verse 16. For necessity is laid upon me, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel.

Now, that's an interesting way to phrase that. He doesn't say, woe to the lost, if I do not preach the gospel. No, he says, woe to me, if I do not preach the gospel.

Now, on the one hand, we can recognize that Paul is speaking here as a God-called, God-ordained minister, and as a minister, God holds him accountable in a way unlike other Christians.

Hebrews 13, 17 says, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as ones who will give an account. James 3, 1, not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

So on the one hand, Paul is speaking as one whom God specifically called and ordained to preach the gospel to the lost. But on the other hand, I believe Paul communicates a principle here that is true for everyone.

[25 : 48] We evangelize because necessity is laid upon us. First, as disciples of Christ, redeemed by his grace, that should be a burden we share.

We should feel compelled to see others saved. We should have great compassion for the lost. After all, we used to be one of them.

And second, this is a command of God. We may not be called in the same way the apostles were, but God has given us the same general imperative, go therefore and make disciples.

Now, as many of you know, I was once part of a hyper-Calvinist group that really didn't practice evangelism at all.

And I remember being confronted by a woman after I preached on this subject once, and she insisted that God gave this command to make disciples only to the apostles.

[26 : 51] And here's what I told her in summary. First of all, read the New Testament again. The apostles were not the only ones making disciples.

Second, let's be very practical about this. Did Jesus really intend for only 13 men to carry the gospel to the end of the earth? Throughout all of church history?

Well, evidently not, because we see him even in Scripture using more than 13 men to do it. And third, why wouldn't we want to make disciples? And that really gets to the heart of the matter.

We don't need God to call and commission each of us individually, speaking from heaven to do it, in order for us to feel that necessity to preach the gospel.

I truly believe this is part of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Do you remember the indictment in Hebrews 5? As those people seem to be turning away from the gospel.

[27 : 55] The author of Hebrews says, for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you yourselves need to be taught again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

In other words, there's an expectation that Christian disciples will eventually become mature enough to teach others. So that's the why of evangelism.

We do it because it's necessary. Now, what is the what of evangelism? What are we doing exactly? Again, verse 19 says, for though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them.

Verse 22, I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. Now, I don't have time to say everything that could be said about the gospel, but I will read for you a succinct definition I wrote in my Bible years ago, and I wish I could remember where this came from, but it says, the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again eternally triumphant over His enemies so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy.

In short, we all stand guilty and condemned before God apart from the atoning work of His Son, Jesus Christ. And as John 3.16 tells us, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

[29 : 45] That's the substance of the good news we preach to a lost world. The cliff is coming, but Christ can save you. Now, the question is, do we believe that message?

Better yet, do we believe in the power of that message? Romans 1. Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Now, I ask whether we believe in the power of the gospel because our evangelistic efforts often indicate otherwise, and I'm lumping myself in with this.

I'm not saying we should beat someone over the head with it, but how many times have we acted fearful and timid about sharing the gospel? I think we forget about its power.

I think we forget about how incredibly effective it can be when God is determined to use it at any given moment to save sinners. Paul wasn't timid.

[30 : 54] Paul wasn't afraid. He wasn't ashamed of the message. He preached it to the Jews. He preached it to Gentiles. He stood before religious leaders. He stood before political leaders.

And he declared the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, as he does show us here in 1 Corinthians 9, we may need to approach different people in different ways.

But the message is fundamentally the same. And Paul did not hesitate to share it with anyone. Why? Because number one, everyone needs to hear it.

And number two, Paul knew the power of that message. Remember what Jesus says. As you go out into the world and you make disciples, he says, I am with you.

Always. Next, let's talk about who. Who do we evangelize? Years ago, Alistair Begg came up with a helpful little term.

[31 : 55] He referred to the practice of frangelism. Frangelism. That's F-R-A-N, which stands for friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors.

In short, pretty much everyone we know. Now, I find that helpful because when we think about evangelism or think about any kind of missionary work, we're prone to think about sharing the gospel with strangers.

Going out onto the streets, perhaps we think about going into the inner city somewhere, or maybe a foreign country, and there's a need for that. But for most of us, most of our evangelistic efforts will be close to home, if not in the home.

Chances are, we all have unconverted, unsaved people in our lives whom we interact with on a regular basis. Well, they are the mission field.

So let's start there. What did Jesus do? He went to his brothers in Israel. He told his apostles to do the same. Only later did he say, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in all Samaria and to the end of the earth.

[33 : 15] So you'll notice he essentially tells them to start at home and then work their way out. Now, what about the how of evangelism, which is generally where we're most curious?

How do we evangelize? Well, what I'll do is I'll just share with you a few things I jotted down in no particular order. First, we have to declare the gospel.

Romans 10, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching?

I know this is a very obvious point to make and I know our actions can go a long way in winning people over, but at some point we have to actually speak the gospel.

At some point we have to actually talk about sin and the Savior. We have to actually say the words. Second, as Paul shows us, different people require different approaches.

[34 : 36] Evangelism is not one size fits all, which means we need to listen and we really need to get to know people. Third, and this goes back to what I was saying in the beginning, we shouldn't assume that people already know everything they need to know about the gospel.

They may claim to know the gospel. They may say they're Christians. They may use many of the right words. But like ignorance in the pilgrims' progress, they may not know the gospel after all. Fourth, evangelism requires wisdom. And that's precisely what can make it so challenging at times. You know, we'd all love to know the secret formula to follow.

We'd all love to have a script that we can simply memorize and recite and maybe you hoped that was what I was preparing to give you. But again, evangelism isn't one size fits all.

Study how Christ did it. Study how Paul and the others did it. Every situation is a little different. Every person is a little different. So we need wisdom.

[35 : 52] I recently heard the story of an airline pilot who had just gotten back from a mission trip and I know we have some pilots here so take heed. He was really excited to share the gospel after this trip.

So on a full commercial flight, he decided to get on the loudspeaker, ask all of the Christians on board to raise their hands and then he encouraged everyone else to turn to those Christians and ask them about Jesus.

While I applaud his enthusiasm, it proved to not be an especially wise move in a post 9-11 world. Some of the passengers began to panic and the crew had to go around calming everyone down. It takes wisdom to share the gospel effectively. Fifth, don't get discouraged. Don't get discouraged. The obligation to save people is not on you. Your obligation is to share the gospel. That's it.

[37 : 01] In one place, Paul says, I planted. Apollos watered. But God gave the growth. Well, God always gives the growth. That's not something we can control.

We can't make people believe. We can't change their hearts. And God doesn't expect us to. We are simply called to tell people about Jesus.

That's it. Sixth, do everything you can to communicate the gospel clearly.

I guess I could have rolled this into the previous point about not assuming people know the gospel, but communicate the gospel clearly. Understand or seek to understand what they believe and articulate the gospel truth as clearly as you can.

Try to avoid misunderstandings. Seventh and final, let's not forget our motivations here. We evangelize first and foremost for the glory of God.

[38 : 15] We evangelize for the glory of God. We evangelize also because Christ saved us. We evangelize because we know God loves these people.

We evangelize because we love these people. And remember this, there is nothing more loving we can possibly do for them than share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christ. It may feel like the polite thing to do to not bring up religion and some of these things, but it's not the loving thing to do.

The most loving thing we can do is warn them, teach them, tell them about Christ. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, it is a very intimidating task to step out into this world to leave our bubble of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and to tell an unbelieving world about your son, the Savior.

To confront them with their sin and point them to a way that leads to life. But Lord, we know, we know because your word tells us, we know through some of our own experiences that your son is always with us.

[39 : 44] We do not have to rely on ourselves, on our own eloquence, on our own talents, but you supply us with words, you supply us with strength, you supply us with guidance and wisdom.

So I pray that you would give us more courage, more boldness to go out into this world, not necessarily far from home or among strangers, but to the very people we know and interact with on a daily basis.

May we see the fields are white for harvest and take action. Lord, help us to not be apathetic in this regard, but to truly do what you have called us to do, and that is be fishers of men, to make disciples of all nations.

Lord, we thank you because somewhere, someone at some time came to us and shared the gospel.

May we do the same for others, and may you bless our efforts all to your glory and for the salvation of your people. In Christ's name I pray, amen.