

TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY

The Lord willing, next Lord's Day morning, in our adult Bible classes, we will begin a study called, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. It is going to be a study of the four gospels, getting into first one gospel and then another throughout the four quarters of the year. My prayer is that each one of you will want to join us for these classes and that through this study this year, your faith and devotion to Christ will grow as it never has before.

I am concerned, as many of you are that evangelism no longer holds the place in the heart of the average Christian that it ought to hold. It is no longer being practiced with any degree of intensity or effectiveness. Christians who have presumably died to themselves seem to be satisfied with just attending some of the services and living a fairly clean moral life. Evangelism doesn't seem to be a high priority with many Christians. I don't presume to know all of the reasons why this has become the norm, but I am beginning to see what might be part a part of the reason. I am afraid that by and large the church has been doing evangelism in the wrong way. This is one of the reasons why starting on Wednesday evening the 7th of January, I will be teaching a class I have entitled, *They Call It the Acts of the Apostles*. That class is going to be an in-depth look at the motivations and methods used by the first century Christians to get the gospel message spread around the world in just one generation—something we have been talking about doing again ever since! I am confident that it will help us tremendously to go back and look at how evangelism was done in the apostolic age, when men led by the Holy Spirit empowered them to accomplish amazing, incredible things!

I think you would be hard pressed to find anyone today who thinks the church is accomplishing amazing, incredible things. Maybe we are. Maybe they are things that are spiritual in nature and I don't want to minimize the importance of those things. For sure, everything about the Lord's work is not visible. I am sure there are a lot of things that God thinks are worth recording that we do not even see at all. But, in terms of numbers we can say we are not doing much. Brotherhood wise, we are barely holding our own. I know we are not in this congregation. In spite of the so-called five-year plan to double the size of this congregation, we have fewer members and fewer in attendance than we did two years ago. I'm not reporting that to put us down or discourage us in anyway. I'm not trying to lay blame on anyone. Actually, I am not discouraged. I am excited! But the reason why I am excited has everything to do with God, and nothing to do with us, or with our efforts. I am excited about the opportunity for the gospel that lies before this church, and I am absolutely confident that the power that is at work in us is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. Go look at [Ephesians 3:20](#) and see if that isn't what Paul was saying!

I believe there is a lot of reason to be excited but I believe we are going to have to turn some things around. One of those things is evangelism and that is the reason this morning I want to try to help us begin re-imaging evangelism. What I mean by that is for us to change our thinking that evangelism is something just a few people do, and start seeing it as something everybody does. We have to change our thinking that evangelism is something we will do some day, but something we do every day. We have to stop thinking of evangelism as an onerous duty and think of it as a precious privilege. I believe we have to make evangelism a priority, both

congregationally and personally. It is not enough to just talk about it. It is something we need to be doing.

This morning I would like for us to take a quick look at what I we might call the three texts of the “great commission.” There is one in Matthew 28, one in Mark 16, and one in Luke 24. The great commission was Jesus’ command to the apostles, and through them it is His command to us today. This is where He who is not only our Savior, but also our Lord has said he wants us to go and make disciples of every nation.

Jesus had been crucified, He was raised three days later, and Luke tells us that for 40 days, Jesus met with the apostles and taught them, and prepared them for the work that they been chosen for. And here it is now, He is about to ascend back to the right hand of the heavenly Father. These are his final words as recorded by **Matthew in chapter 28, verses 18-20**. He says:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19) 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, 20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

In **Mark’s account—16:15 and 16**—we read:

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. 16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Luke tells us, in 24, beginning in verse 44:

...he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45) Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46) and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47) and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

There are four things I want to draw from these three texts this morning. Let’s think about these things:

First, the great commission is a command, not a suggestion. The apostles did not take what Jesus said to be simply be a suggestion, and neither should we. Jesus prefaced what He told the apostles by reminding them that He had been given the highest authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus wasn’t saying that to sort of brag on Himself. He was saying that because He wanted those men to know this was what He expected of them; that they would go and preach the gospel to every creature, as Mark tells us.

Furthermore, it wasn’t a command just given to the apostles. Those who became disciples because of their preaching the gospel were to also be taught to observe everything Christ

had commanded the apostles. In other words, Christ commanded the apostles to pass that command on to us.

- If the apostles did not go and proclaim the gospel, they would not have been obedient to Christ.
- If they did not teach those that were becoming disciples to observe all that Christ had commanded, they would not have been obedient to Christ.
- If those who had become disciples did not observe all that Christ had commanded the apostles, then they would not have been obedient to Christ.

Evangelism, brethren, is not a suggestion, and we can no more ignore or put off obedience to this command than to ignore or refuse to obey the command to repent and be baptized.

Second, the method of evangelism involves proclamation. This is very clear from the text in both Mark and Luke. In Mark, Jesus said, *“go into all the world and preach (or, proclaim) the gospel to every creature.”* In Luke, Jesus said, *“repentance and remission of sins is to be preached (or proclaimed) in his name to all nations.”*

The word translated preach, or proclaim is the Greek word Kerusso, which the Greek lexicons tell us means, *“to be a herald, to officiate as a herald 1a) to proclaim after the manner of a herald 1b) always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed 2) to publish, proclaim openly: something which has been done 3) used of the public proclamation of the gospel and matters pertaining to it, made by John the Baptist, by Jesus, by the apostles and other Christian teachers.”*

We have been called to be a people who speak up, who go about talking, not just about anything and everything. We are called to be a people who talk about our God, and our Savior. We must do that because everyone else needs Him to be their God and Savior also.

In **Romans 10:9, & 10**, the apostle Paul wrote, *“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”* Now the folks who believe in and try to push the idea of “salvation by faith only” are fond of citing verse 9. But Paul doesn’t just say, *“if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.”* He said that, but that was after he said, *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.”* He then goes on to say in verse 10, *“for with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”* If one can be saved because they confessed the name of Jesus at one time, they can be saved if they believed in Jesus at one time. That isn’t what Paul is saying, and I think we know that! The point I want you to see is this: twice Paul uses the expression, “with the mouth.” The mouth is used for speaking. The mouth is used for communication. The mouth is used for proclamation, and just as we should never quit believing in our hearts, we should never quit confessing with our mouths.

Evangelism involves proclamation, but I don’t want you to be scared by that. We can learn how to do that but we never will learn if we do not believe that Christ is calling us to do it.

We will never learn how to do it if we do not want to do it. The devil is surely happy when Christians believe all that is required of them is to live a good life and show up for services. It is important that we live a life that is worthy of the gospel. I'm not saying that is not important. I am just saying that demonstration is not the same thing as proclamation. How you live your life, your faithfulness as far as the assemblies are concerned is not a substitute for your proclamation. I know we want it to be! Oh how we want it to be! We so desperately want to believe that when we stood before the congregation and we were asked if we believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, our answer to that question was all the confession we would ever have to make! But what if that isn't true? What if the truth is, as Peter describes it, you have been born again in order to be "... *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*"

Third, that which we are to proclaim is His story. Matthew's account really doesn't give us much insight on that, but Mark says we are to proclaim the gospel. Luke's account says that we are to proclaim repentance and remission of sins in Christ's name. That doesn't mean that there are two different things we are to proclaim. They are one and the same thing. It is by the proclamation of the gospel that repentance and remission of sins comes about. The gospel, as I have said a number of times in the past year is the story of God's plan for man's redemption; a plan that began in His mind and heart even before the universe was created. It was a plan that unfolded in history right down to the time God Himself became a man and then gave Himself as an offering upon the cross for the sins of mankind. The story tells us this One who died for us rose from the dead three days later, and then ascended to the right hand of God on high, where He now reigns over all creation, and intercedes for the saints. The good news, however, is not simply a story to be told, it also includes provisions for how sinners can enter into a covenant with God and have their sins forgiven. That's where faith and repentance and baptism for the remission of sins come in. When one hears the gospel and obeys it, then they truly have a reason for rejoicing.

I am mindful of the example of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in the **8th chapter of the books of Acts**. This high official from Ethiopia had been to Jerusalem to worship God. While there, he had obtained a copy of the inspired scriptures. I don't know how much of the scriptures he had, maybe everything, but we know that at the very least, he had the scroll of Isaiah. He was reading that which is the 53rd chapter of Isaiah in our Bible, which was a prophetic reference to the sacrifice of Christ. But the Ethiopian didn't know that, and so what he was reading was a bit confusing to him. When Philip, a Christian, heard the man reading Isaiah, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. The official replied, "How can I unless someone guides me." **Verse 35** says, "*and beginning with that same scripture, Philip preached the good news of Jesus to him.*" Now notice, in the very next verse, when they had come upon some water—probably an oasis--the Ethiopian said, "*See, here is water, what prevents me from being baptized?*" So preaching Christ to this man included revealing to him how to embrace the good news. And he did! He immediately confessed his faith and was buried with Christ by baptism for the remission of his sins.

Now that is not to say that the gospel is all people need to be taught and learn. No, there is more, and Matthew does give us some insight into that. He quotes Jesus as saying, with reference to those who have embraced the gospel and become His disciples, "*and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"

There are things one needs to learn in order to become a disciple of Christ, and there are things one needs to learn after they become a disciple. Sometimes we make the mistake of turning those things around. Because we live in a world that has seen the fragmentation of Christianity into hundreds and hundreds of different denominations, and because we know there has been and still is a lot of unscriptural teaching out there, and because we want to make sure that people are being taught the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, many times we want to teach them as much as we can about the Bible and about the church before we have told them the old, old story of Christ. It isn't a matter of either/or. Both are important, but one is foundational and has to come first and the other comes later and builds upon the foundation, which is Christ.

Finally, the fourth thing I want you to see is that

The goal of evangelism is to make disciples. Going into all the world and preaching the gospel to every creature, proclaiming repentance and remission of sins in Jesus name has one objective, and that is to make disciples of Christ. Too many times we have thought that the goal is to baptize people. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul made it very clear, that is not the goal. In order for a person to become a disciple of Christ, it is true that they must be baptized, but baptism becomes the means to an end, not the end itself. Sometimes we have thought the goal of evangelism was to grow our church. That's also not true. It is true that a disciple of Christ will be a faithful member of the body of Christ, but again, that is a by-product of evangelism, not the goal.

The goal of evangelism is to make disciples, so what is a disciple? A disciple of Christ is someone who has committed themselves to Christ as their Lord and Savior. They are people who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, as Peter confessed in Matthew 16:18. But even more than that, they are people who are committed to learning everything they can about Christ and from Christ, and being as much like Him as possible, in both their thinking, their attitudes, their words and the things they do with their life.

That is why I really want each of you to dedicate yourself this next year to really getting into the greatest story ever told. I want you to immerse yourself in His story until you have fallen in love with Him all over again, until His thoughts become your thoughts, His ways, your ways; His priorities, your priorities. When you do that then evangelism will not be something you fear, it will be something you prize. It won't be something you have to do, it will be something you can't keep from doing.

My time is up but let me close with these questions: have you heard and believed his story, the gospel? Did that lead you to repentance and remission of sins? Were you baptized into the name of Christ? Are you faithfully striving to be His disciple? Is there anything you

want to make know this morning. If so, I invite you to come to the front as we stand and sing the invitation song.