

Developing a Heart for the Harvest

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Much of our conversation about evangelism has to do with what is wrong with the harvest. "People are too busy" or "Folks already have their own religion" or "the world is so secular" - these are common excuses for why more evangelistic effort is not expended on our part. What folly! Perhaps instead of blaming the harvest we should spend a moment working on the harvesters - you and I. If in a world that is adverse to Jesus Christ (and it is) we are going to speak for the Lord anyway something must happen within the harvester's hearts that will move and motivate them to do a difficult task with joy. So I ask "What can we do to develop a deeper concern for lost people, a concern that will motivate us to do all we can to tell folks of redemption in Jesus?"

First, consider the value of the soul. Isn't it amusing how people will chase after reports of treasure or wealth? If a Spanish galleon loaded with gold is located dive ships appear from everywhere as everyone tries to get in on the find. When the lottery jackpot gets big people stand in line to play. People will do most anything for treasure, won't they? But what treasure has more value than a human soul? Jesus said "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Do we really understand that? Realize that Jesus came here and *did not offer* a cure for every physical illness and disease, or a financial remedy for the poor or a political solution to an oppressive government. Jesus came to redeem and save and rescue what mattered most: souls. Do I value souls like Jesus does? *He was willing to give His life on a cruel cross for souls.* What am I willing to do for souls?

Second, understand that hell is very real. Despite our current society's loathing of the idea of eternal condemnation the Bible assures us that hell is real, and

people are really going to go there and be there without end. Usually we talk about that as a motivator to make sure our behavior is what it ought to be, because we don't want to go. But who do you love that you'd like to see go there? Can you imagine your spouse, your parents, your brother, your best friend, your co-worker in such a place for all eternity? It isn't imagination, it

isn't fantasy or a bad dream. The disobedient will be lost. Jesus will come "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God,

and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with **everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). If reading of hell motivates you to do right, then it ought also motivate us to try and save as many others as we can. I don't want anyone to go there, so I must do what I can to help everyone who will turn from such a place.

Finally, stop worrying about baptisms. Let's not play games and pretend Jesus was wrong. Jesus said "few will find it" (Mt. 7:14) and He was right. Of the hundreds of people you will meet and know in a lifetime comparatively few will ever be interested in the Gospel. Of the few folks you will form close association with even fewer of them will listen to your thoughts about religion, and only a small minority of that group will ever respond. That is overwhelmingly discouraging if we believe our task is to baptize people. Frankly, most folks define evangelism in terms of baptisms, they know that isn't going to happen so many say "why even try?"

Theme for this Issue:

EVANGELISM

Refusing to Quarrel

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Without a doubt, quarreling and arguing in our evangelistic efforts today will have a negative impact or result. Not only does it affect our credibility as an advocate and teacher of God's word, but it can potentially turn away a soul that is lost. Furthermore, such actions are not supported by scripture. The Bible shows the sincere, humble Christian is genuinely concerned for the lost soul at stake, and as a result will let the living word of God, which is active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12), pierce the individual's heart. So then, let's further consider some suggestions based on scripture which will help us to avoid quarreling in our endeavor to spread the gospel.

We must remember that our primary duty regarding evangelism is to simply plant the seed (1 Cor. 3:6). God will handle the rest, including the piercing and conviction of the heart which will bring about necessary repentance, confession and baptism. He will provide the increase. When Jesus commissioned the apostles what did he say? "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Allowing a quarrel or argument into a Bible study or religious discussion only corrupts the soil in which the seed is being implanted. It is our responsibility to present and accurately handle the word of truth so that we can be workmen approved of by God (2 Tim. 2:15). It is also our responsibility to prevent distractions, such as those caused by quarreling, from interfering with the planting of the seed (God's word.)

The fact remains that throughout our evangelistic efforts some people will disagree and revert to arguing as a means to make their viewpoint known (1 Tim. 6:3-5). As children of God how should we handle this type of circumstance? Flat out refusing to quarrel would be the best solution, but we can certainly squelch such from occurring by maintaining and exhibiting a loving heart and a spirit of gentleness and humility. Remember, without the love and grace of God, we too would be lost. The love of the Father which Jesus had experienced was such that He wanted to share it

with others (John 15:9; 17:26). We should share the same love with those who oppose us in our efforts to share the gospel with them. In fact, Paul instructs Timothy to correct those who are in opposition with gentleness (NASB) and humility (NKJV) in 2 Tim. 2:25. We will likely not convince an individual they are wrong if we first make them angry or "wrangle about words." Paul says such action is useless and leads to the ruin of hearers (2 Tim. 2:14). Solomon speaks to this as well, saying "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness," Prov. 15:1-2.

Considering the end results of quarreling will help us to see its ineffectiveness. Think about it: what good and positive result comes from arguing with others about the gospel, and are we furthering the cause of Christ by doing so? Does the person we are studying with see Christ in us when we degenerate to such tactics? Paul exhorts Timothy to press upon the hearts of others to "avoid worldly and empty chatter," because it will "lead to further ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:16). He goes on to point out in 2 Tim. 2:23 that foolish and ignorant speculations result in quarrels, and continues to say the child of God must not be quarrelsome in verse 24. We are to simply refuse and avoid any kind of talk or behavior which causes harsh contention. These are very plain and simple exhortations - turn away from quarreling, have nothing to do with it, and do not take part in it.

Our evangelistic efforts will be most successful when the focus is on spreading the word to lost souls in a loving, gentle, humble and patient manner. God's powerful word will firmly root itself in the heart of those who are willing to receive it, thereby convicting them to act upon it and to obey and remain faithful to it. Nowhere in this process is there room for quarreling and arguing about the word. Instead we're admonished to steer clear of such behavior. Why? Because the gospel is mighty and authoritative - it alone will pierce the heart of wayward souls and demand their subjection. "For the gospel is the power of God, and will bring about salvation to anyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Our responsibility is to simply communicate and share it with others. †

Overcoming Discouragement

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They promised you they would come to the meeting. They never showed up. They agreed to study the Bible with you. They backed out at the last minute when some “emergency” suddenly arose. Such repeated rejection can quickly extinguish the fires of evangelism, the very fires that gave us the courage to ask and invite people in the first place. What’s worse, when we see no immediate results from our initial efforts, we develop an attitude of “nobody cares anymore” or “why even bother?”

Consider Jesus, the Master Teacher. Whether in a large crowd or one-on-one, Jesus had this unique ability to always say the right thing at the right time. Did everyone listen and follow Him? No, only those who had ears to hear. But at least He gave everyone the information to decide for themselves. He is the one who instructs us to “go and teach” (Matt. 28:18-20); He is also the one who invites us to “come and learn” (Matt. 11:28-30). Let’s sit at His feet for a while and see how He refused to become discouraged while talking with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.

People are prospects, not suspects. Jesus could have easily passed up the opportunity to talk to this woman as one who “probably wouldn’t listen anyway.” John reminds us that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9) and reveals that the disciples “were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman” (4:27). But Jesus didn’t care about those things. He just saw a soul who was in desperate need of a Savior.

We give up too quickly on people. But just because the last five have not produced no visible results does not give you the right to write off the sixth one. Instead of taking one look at someone and judging them an unfit prospect, let’s remember that the gospel is the power of God to save “everyone” (Rom. 1:16). Any other approach is suspect.

Patience and persistence eventually payoff. At first, this woman just didn’t get it (John 4:10-15). He talked about living water. She asked, “where’s your bucket?” He told her about water that quenches your spiritual thirst. She remarked, “I sure would like some so I wouldn’t have to keep coming to this well to draw

water.” Yet Jesus did not dismiss her as someone who was too ignorant to understand. He kept trying.

Maybe that’s why the Master Teacher referred to it as sowing seeds. You plant and water and fertilize and water some more. And you wait. We get frustrated when people can’t see the application of passages that seem so plain to us. But the truth will always open the eyes of those who are willing to see. Be patient. It’s worth the wait.

It only takes one. Jesus took time to talk to a woman whom we would have classified a “dead end.” And because He refused to disqualify her, an entire village was given the opportunity to hear the same gospel message. “From that city many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified” (John 4:39). She went and reported what had happened to her neighbors, her family, her fellow citizens. When they came to investigate for themselves, they developed their own faith. But it all started with one conversation.

Do you know why we need to keep trying and planting and inviting? Because, sooner or later, we will find that one. Someone who learns the greatest story ever told and decides that it’s too good not to tell. They tell their boyfriend. They tell their mother. They tell their boss. They tell their neighbor. And I’ll tell you what the best thing to do is when you find that one. Go find another one.

Think about the person who shared the gospel with you. If your mother or father taught you, think about the person who taught them. Aren’t you glad they didn’t get discouraged and quit? Aren’t you thankful that they were persistent through the first signs of resistance and kept searching for the most effective way to get the message through? That’s what the Master Teacher did. And He needs pupils who care enough about the souls of men that they will reach out and rescue them from the bondage of sin. Someone did that for you. Go and do likewise.

We have come and learned of Him. Now it’s time to go and teach of Him. Please tell me, what part of “go” don’t you understand? †

Tape of the Month: “Thank God for America!”

Without doubt there is much wrong with our country, but there is also much to be thankful for. This lesson explores how God has blessed us so richly. Write, call or email for this free tape.

Heart from p. 1

There are a couple of answers to that line of thought. First, we might note that some do obey the Gospel that we never expect to do so. I have taught folks that I just knew were on the verge of baptism – and they never were baptized. Others I barely believed had any interest, much less any real chance of obedience became delightful Christians. The Scriptures have those too - Sergius Paulus, a governor, Justin a ruler of the very Jewish synagogue, and yes, a vicious persecutor named Paul. It all works together to say be careful who you cross off your list!

But more importantly, and what helps our heart, is to relieve the pressure. “I planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the increase*. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but *God who gives the increase*” (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Who gives the increase? God does. How liberating! If I talk to someone about Jesus and they are unresponsive that isn't my fault, or my problem. I just do what Jesus commands. I teach the gospel, that is all. I need to care deeply about people, and I want people to obey the Gospel, but I don't have to go through any sort of mental checklist to decide who

will meet a quota, or get my annual baptism average up. I can just teach people.

This may be the most revolutionary and yet most under-rated idea of all. When we believe we should baptize we put pressure on ourselves and pressure on the prospect. It isn't enjoyable, and we are all tight and tension-filled. We can't wait for people to grow at their own rate. We aren't doing this for the joy of telling good news, we are flat out trying to bag another one, get another notch in our belt. Evangelism becomes being a high pressure salesman and manipulator for Jesus instead of a wonderful opportunity to speak of what is closest to our hearts. Try relaxing a little. You can do evangelism but you can't make people obey the Gospel. And praise the Lord, you just don't have to!

The fields are still white unto harvest. Millions are caught up in false religion and man-made counterfeit Christianity. Millions more are trapped in our secular society, with no religion of any kind. We cannot claim to have the heart of Jesus if we can passively watch people be lost without regrets. Let us develop a heart for the harvest - a heart that will move us to do the Lord's will and do all we can to speak for Him!

Mark

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