

The Outreach of the Church Various Scriptures

Intro – This probably won't surprise you, but I know absolutely NOTHING about dancing. It is not a natural talent that I have and I have never taken any classes in dancing technique. Neither do I watch dancing with the stars on TV. But that doesn't keep me from doing it!

Sometimes, we'll get Caleb or John to playing some "dancing music" on the piano, and Hudson and Andrew and I will "dance" around the living room. It is quite a heel kicking, high jumping, dizzy time! I wouldn't know the difference between a Salsa and a Tango, or between a line dance and a Waltz, well maybe I would know a waltz if I saw one, but nevertheless, when I'm hanging out with the kids at home, I'm not going to let my total ignorance of dancing get in the way of us having some fun!

In my totally arbitrary opinion, dancing is kind of like that: you can be highly trained or totally ignorant and you can still have some fun with it.

Over the last few weeks we've been talking about the calling and purposes of the church. The church is called to reflect God's glory by worship, discipleship, and evangelizing. And this week our focus is on evangelization. And evangelization is sometimes like the dance floor at a Jr. High dance. Everybody is too timid to get out there and try it.

But you don't have to be highly trained to share Jesus with someone. It doesn't hurt to have some training, but too much training shouldn't get in the way of actually doing it! In fact, once you've tried it, sharing Christ with others is like kicking up your heels, it is exciting and always worth it.

This morning, I want to organize our thought about Outreach and the Church around 3 basic passages of Scripture:

The Great Commandment – love the Lord your God...

The Great Commission – go and make disciples...

The 2nd Greatest Commandment – love your neighbor...

1. The Great Commandment – love the Lord your God...

- a. I'd like for us to look at what Jesus called the greatest commandment in the law:

Matthew 22:34-38 - But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment.

- b. But you might ask, what does this great command to love the Lord our God have to do with church outreach? Well, without truly loving God, any Christian evangelism or church outreach will be a disaster.
- c. Loving God with all of our heart, soul, and mind makes us want to live holy lives. It makes us zealous for God and obedience to Him, and it motivates evangelism - we want God to receive glory and honor and love from more people.

- d. Loving God with all of our hearts makes our testimony real. We aren't selling something like a used car salesman; we are sharing something that has changed our very lives.
- e. **Illustration** – Loving God with all our hearts is the anchor of evangelism.
- f. And at the same time, one way to tell whether or not we truly love God is whether or not we want to share Him and His good news with others.
- g. **Application** – There are basically two applications to this commandment and the way that it relates to evangelism:
 - i. If you are not sharing the Gospel, and we will talk later about simple ways to do that, but if you are not sharing the Gospel, then you need to repent of not loving God with all of your heart.
 - ii. And if you do not love God with all of your heart, you need to get that right BEFORE you start evangelizing. There needs to be some reality to your Christian life when you share the Christian message.
 - iii. Bottom line, the foundation of all Christian ministry and outreach needs to be genuine love to God.

2. The Great Commission – go and make disciples...

Matthew 28:18-20 - And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- a. Of course, we know that the Great Commission has EVERYTHING to do with church outreach and mission.
- b. **There are two very important things that the Great Commission requires of every church and every Christian:**
 - i. **PROCLAMATION**
 - ii. **COMMITMENT**
- c. **PROCLAMATION** – To make disciples we must proclaim the Gospel. We must tell the story of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - In Luke 24 Jesus appears to His disciples after His resurrection. And they are confused and doubting and part of His explanation to them of everything that has happened and will happen after He ascends to heaven is this:

Luke 24:45-48 - Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things.

- Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to the nations!
- We are to be witnesses to God's redeeming power.
- But we should also ask ourselves the question "What are we to proclaim?" The true Gospel is what we must proclaim. It cannot be watered down. We cannot make it palatable and comfortable to those who don't really want to hear it.
- The TRUE GOSPEL is a STORY. It is the story of God sending His own Son to die for the sins of people. It is the story of Jesus' suffering and death upon the cross. It is the story of substitution. He was accepting the condemnation for MY sins and YOURS. The true gospel

is the story of a cold tomb and then 3 days later an empty tomb. It is the story of the resurrection of Jesus in victory and power of sin and hell. The true gospel is a story.

- The TRUE GOSPEL is also a CALL – It is a call to repentance! One author put it this way, “Christ does not conform; he confronts.” We cannot preach an “easy” gospel. We must proclaim that Jesus calls for us to come to Him with open hands, with unlocked hearts, allowing Him to transform us. We cannot withhold ourselves from His Lordship. The Gospel is a call to repent of sin and enter into a process of change.

- The TRUE GOSPEL is also a CALL to RESTORATION! As we noticed there in Luke 24, Jesus told his apostles that forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed. That forgiveness means restoration to a right relationship with our Creator. We cannot be right with God by working hard at doing good. We cannot be right with God by giving money. We cannot become right with God by praying a million prayers or going on a million pilgrimages. We can only be made right with God by receiving His Son as our only hope!

- So... We’re saying that the Great Commission requires PROCLAMATION. But we need to also ask ourselves if we have received that Gospel message. Are we trusting in Christ alone for our salvation? And then are we proclaiming that true Gospel: the story of redemption, the call of repentance, and the call of restoration?

- And then I mentioned that the Great Commission requires...

- d. **COMMITMENT** – There is a reason that I preached on Christian discipleship and church nurture last week before coming to the subject of evangelism and mission. Our willingness to share the Gospel must flow out of personal commitment to Christ. As I’ve already mentioned if we don’t love God with all of our hearts, we won’t evangelize. If we don’t love God with all of our hearts we shouldn’t evangelize until we get right with Him!

- Philip Graham Ryken in his book City on a Hill records some comments from an unpublished letter from missionaries Tom and Cynthia Hale:

“The question is often asked: ‘How can we recruit more long-term missionaries?’ The answer, we believe, is for churches to place great emphasis on discipling their members, on challenging their members to deny self, to forsake all, and to follow Christ with no conditions or limitations – in other words to ‘sell out’ to Christ.”

- The Great Commission requires commitment.

- e. Finally...

3. The 2nd Greatest Commandment – love your neighbor...

- a. Before we close this morning we need to talk about HOW to evangelize. And I could make a list of all kinds of things to do. But this morning, I want to maybe take a little different approach.

- b. **Illustration** – Joseph Bayly wrote a story called “The Gospel Blimp”. In the story, George and Ethel are concerned for their neighbor’s salvation. So they are together with some of their other Christian friends when they are inspired by a blimp passing high overhead. So they all buy a blimp and start “International Gospel Blimps, Inc.” They pull Biblical banners behind their blimp, they blanket the community with Gospel tracts, they even blast Christian music and programming from on high. But, as you might expect, it doesn’t work very well.

- c. Let’s return to the conversation between Jesus and the lawyer who was asking about the greatest commandments in the law. In **Matthew 22** Jesus has already said the Greatest Commandment is to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind. But then Jesus says...

Matthew 22:39-40 - And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

- d. **The first step to practical evangelism is to start by loving your neighbor.**

- e. Now... if we truly love our neighbor, whether that is our neighbor at work, or down the street, or the one with a locker next to ours, if we truly love our neighbor we are going to pray for them. And we are going to truly care about them. And then we are going to serve them. And then at some point, we are going to want to simply tell them what is most important to our lives, namely God and a relationship with Him, and then ask them if we can talk to them about it!
- f. Now, I said earlier that I could give you a whole list of practical ways to reach out to people with the Gospel. But the list is already pretty obvious. We need to love people and truly care about them. If we truly love them, we will want to talk with them at appropriate times and appropriate ways about a relationship with God.
- g. Again, in his book City on a Hill, Philip Graham Ryken talks about this simple approach to outreach. Something that he has noticed is how ordinary most overseas missionaries are, and how the things that they do are so ordinary. In their prayer letters, missionaries often talk about how they were having coffee with a neighbor and how they had an opportunity to talk about spiritual things. We simply need to follow their example in ordinary ways of reaching out.

Conclusion – There are basically just 3 things that I want to say as we close...

- There is something exceedingly obvious about this that should go without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway. If we are going to love people and point them to Christ by simple acts of friendship, we are going to have to build friendships with non-Christians. Have you ever noticed that evangelism doesn't work on people who are already evangelized? How are you specifically connecting with people who need you to be their Christian friend?
- Be real... When you are friends with non-Christians be yourself. Don't compromise, but don't be all worried that you're going to mess things up. One time a friend of mine told me to stop worrying about money for a particular missions trip because God believes in missions more than I do. And something similar is true here. God loves that friend more than you do, and God is interested in using you to minister to them even more than you are. If you are nervous when the conversation turns toward spiritual things, tell them so. Be honest and be yourself, but let people know that you are committed to Christ and they will respect that.
 - Recently I heard an interview with a Christian author, Carolyn McCulley. She worked in the movie industry and shortly after she became a Christian her co-workers came to know about her faith. Pretty soon a guy from another company asked her out and her co-workers asked her if she had told him about herself. She was quite different in her commitments and they had decided that she wasn't quite normal anymore. And they required her to tell this guy that she was a Christian and what that meant for a dating relationship! They actually helped her "be real".
- And then finally, don't be afraid to invite people to church. People need to see your life. People need to hear you share the Gospel with them, but they also need to see the community that the Gospel creates. Evangelism apart from the church doesn't usually work very well. Don't be afraid that a 45 minute sermon is going to scare people away from becoming a Christian. They need to know what the Bible says to believers and non-believers before they commit to Christ. I have a feeling that most non-Christians in America have met some lousy "Christians" who may have not been committed to Christ and the Bible at all. (For example, this week Pat Robertson said on his television show that a man married to an Alzheimer's patient would be justified in divorcing her and remarrying because he was lonely and longed for real companionship.) And because many Americans have met a lousy representative of Christ, it helps if they come to church and start to

hear what Biblical Christianity is all about. We might compare the church to the greenhouse where the germination of the Gospel seed germinates the best.

So finally...

- Evangelism, mission, and outreach must be motivated by loving God with all of our hearts. Do you love God?
- Evangelism requires that we proclaim the Gospel and live authentic Christian lives. Will you proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins?
- And loving our neighbor is the best way to introduce them to Christ. Do you love your neighbor?

You know, the reason that I started out talking about dancing is that evangelism is like dancing, you don't have to be an expert to have a lot of fun doing it!