

“Evangelism”

Summer Series 3

Lesson 2

“Why are we called to Evangelism?”

Objective: To understand what we are called to believe as followers of Christ more precisely and more deeply. This is not just an exercise in mental acumen, but a quest to deepen and enrich our relationship with God, our relationship with His people and how we relate to His mission.

We hope to understand more deeply and fully what it means to be Christian, how this means we are called to be unique. We are called to be the people of God. We are called to this mission by Jesus Himself (Matthew 28:18-20). We have a purpose and we are to fulfill the purpose of God.

Materials: The Bible, Books, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet and other resources as may be appropriate.

Procedures

1. To explore what we believe that Evangelism is and why it is important.
2. Next we will hope to understand more fully the nature of our existence and in so doing comprehend God’s call upon our existence in order to fulfill our destiny as His image-bearers.
3. We will seek to find out how these beliefs have played a role in the history of Christianity and how they continue to impact our existence and service to Him today.
4. We will provide a sheet to take home as a reminder of what has been examined and to provide additional opportunities for consideration of these truths and application in our daily living out of our eternal destiny beginning now. This sheet can be used as a discussion guide for small group discussion. We have several groups using this effectively.

It has been said that one cannot truly understand the history of the Church apart from its central concern, its central mission; evangelism.¹ As I said previously there is a tendency in the modern Church to push “evangelism” to the edge as if it is a periphery matter that makes evangelism more of an appendage rather than central; a core matter, the heart of what it means to be Church. The fact that we are even discussing the reason “why” the Church is called to evangelism seems to betray a basic misunderstanding that exists in the modern church of the nature of the “good news,” itself. The act of “mission,” or the act of “evangelism” stands at the very core of what it means to be Church.² The Church is not a club, a business, or an organization in the sense that we so often think of these entities.

Entities such as these are created by human beings to meet their needs, wants and desires. The term Church is as much about describing the “why” of Church as it is about describing “what” the Church is. The Church exists as a missional entity, that is continuing the mission of God that He began and we see most fully

¹ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

² William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.



brought into physical reality in Jesus. Often we describe the Church in a number of different ways and certainly the Church fulfills a number of different functions and roles as it performs its primary function. The Church exists primarily and centrally as a force for mission, for evangelism. When and if, a group calling itself a Church forgets this central focus they cease to be what is described in the New Testament as “The Ekklesia” the people called out for a purpose, the Church of Jesus Christ. His Church is a missional group of people called out by God, empowered by His Spirit in the task of proclaiming the Gospel message to the very ends of the earth.

As we look at explaining why evangelism is important we must continue to understand evangelism is the act of mission that we see lived out in Jesus, in His life as the lamb of God, the true image-bearer of God, and the portal of restored relationship with God. The Church is not a building, an organization, an entity, or even an activity, it is far more encompassing and overarching than any of these singular concepts, it is about mission, the mission of God. At its core the Church is seen not so much as being defined by what it does and even how it does things, but it is the result of



the continuing action of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit transforming the old and broken world in an act of eighth day creation into the “very good” world that God always intended it to be as the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe. We live in a world today that stands at a new nexus, a junction between the old order and the new.

For many centuries (at least since the time of Constantine) the world has been dominated by a view of Christianity that allowed Christianity to be seen as not only acceptable, but as favored, and even essential, in Western societies.³ Without question Western culture is now reverting to what Christopher Dawson describes as “a new kind of paganism.”⁴ The traditional underpinnings of ideals and morals, engendered in the past by the Christian Gospel and Christian understandings, on which these Western cultural communities were constructed are now showing massive tectonic fissures. “The bowels of Western civilization are being exposed and they are no longer Christian.” We see all around us the manifestations of this reality in the demand for

³ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

⁴ Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to Renewal of Human Life* (New York NY: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 22.



state-supported abortion, declining church membership, increasing Church-state confrontations, and the loss of the luxury of the spontaneous general favorable acceptance of the Church.⁵

In such a context, the Church must evaluate not only the way it continues the mission of God, but it must be reminded of the “why” of that mission. In the beginning of the Church, in the Roman world, the Church had little to provide it with solace and comfort other than the sole comfort of hope in the resurrection.⁶ We are confronted then with a question today that faced the early Church, the “why” of evangelism? Why seek to proclaim a message of hope and love to a world that hates, fears, and ridicules our faith? It is perhaps most appropriate in such a context to examine the missionary endeavors of the early church to see what instruction can be gained.⁷ Especially for those that come from the traditions of the churches of Christ this should be a natural and comfortable endeavor. Our tradition of looking to first

⁵ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

⁶ Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to Renewal of Human Life*, p. 23.

⁷ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

century Christianity should uniquely prepare us for such a journey of discovery and examination.

“Why” Did the early church evangelize?

The early Church evangelized because it had to. This is a statement that needs to be understood in the strictest possible sense. The early Church did not begin the task of evangelism simply because of the command of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). Evangelism was not simply a response of obedience to a high authority (that of Jesus, or God). Neither did the Church primarily evangelize out of a deep sense of gratitude to God for His great love. They did not evangelize out of a sense of responsibility for the lost of the world, nor out of deep concern for fallen mankind which would one day face the judgement seat of Almighty God. These are more emotive causations for the Church’s mission activity of evangelism. We will talk more about these motivations later. “Rather, the Church evangelized because it could not do otherwise, because in the Holy Spirit the Church had been taken up into the very activity of God, in Christ, whereby the final purposes of God are being fulfilled.”⁸

⁸ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

It was not for them about them doing “soul-winning,” God takes care of the soul and only God can save the soul. He can do that with, or without us, He chooses to allow us to join Him in His acts of grace. The impetus for proclaiming the Good News, for evangelizing was even more compelling for the early Church than it was for Jeremiah. He wrote in Jeremiah 20:9, **“If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”**⁹ There was no way for the early Church to hold in the power of the Holy Spirit in as it undertook the work of proclaiming the Gospel message to the very ends of the earth. They had no choice in the sense that they understood accepting Christ meant accepting His mission. In truth, it should be no different today and I believe it is no different for the true Church of Jesus Christ today. Those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ are compelled to be about the things of their master, their Lord. Their very bones burn, their very souls burn with the fire of the Spirit compelling them to spread the love of God, to proclaim the message of hope decreed by God to

⁹ NRSV.

overcome all rebellion, all brokenness, all separation. The decrees of God cannot help but be obeyed even by the rocks, and the mountains. Even the nothingness of the emptiness and the void hears the command of God and obeys (Genesis 1:2-3). For those who have been touched by the Spirit of God their ears once again are attuned to hear the voice of Almighty God and they obey.

It is the case that the early Church did not understand evangelism as a purely human action that was done as a response to the good things God had done. Evangelism was a continuing act of Christ working through their daily lives of sacrifice as disciples of Jesus. Christ continued His mission in the lives of the Church, in lives given willingly and wholeheartedly, in lives handed over to God. Evangelism was then seen as the action of God Himself bringing salvation to mankind, acting in union with the disciples of Jesus, who joined the mission of God. “The early Church understood mission to be the very expression of the Lordship of Christ in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰ They believed that there was a symbiosis that took place in their lives that meant they were empowered to participate now with God in His kingdom and His

¹⁰ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

mission (Luke 6:45¹¹). These people were changed, transformed, and empowered by the Spirit of God and now as a part of His kingdom they fulfilled His Holy mission of reconciliation. They were no longer their own people, they understood that they had been bought with a price.¹²

Just as on that first day when God began to create we see the Spirit of God hovering over the surface of the deep as a mother bird hovers over her eggs awaiting the new life (Genesis 1:2¹³): so also the Spirit of God hovers over the Church. Beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3) a new day, a new era of God's activity begins. Just as the Spirit of God was involved in the creation of the ante-diluvian world, so now the Spirit is involved in the creation of the new world. The Spirit is integral to the transformative work of God. The Spirit is also the agency through which God empowers His mission of spreading the Good News to all of creation.

¹¹ **The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.** NRSV.

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:20 **For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.** NRSV.

¹³ **Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the face of the abyss, but the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water.**

Another aspect of theology that often escapes us is that the Early Church understood the world in terms of kingdom and they had now become fully participants in the Kingdom of God, in the fullness of all that means. That Kingdom was now on the march and would reach to the very ends of the earth.¹⁴ In light of the truth of this we may state two things: first, Jesus ministry is not contained temporally, or geographically, but rather contains within itself the scope of universal mission, universal reach and universal potentiality. Its reach extends to the totality of all creation. Secondly, the reality is that the Church is nothing other than a manifestation of the continuing mission of Jesus reflected in joining with humanity in partnership with His own being and person. This point is seen illustrated in the application of Isaiah 49:6¹⁵ and 42:6¹⁶ in the New Testament. Within the texts of the New Testament Jesus is expressly referred to as the “Light to the

¹⁴ Zechariah 9:9-10 **Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰ He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.** NRSV.

¹⁵ . . . he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” NRSV.

¹⁶ **I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,** NRSV.

Gentiles (Luke 2:27-32¹⁷), or the Light of the world (John 8:12,¹⁸ 9:5¹⁹). In the ministry of Jesus, in His life, death and resurrection, the purposes of God for all the nations are being brought to fruition.²⁰

When we look at the ministry of Paul in relation to his mission to proclaim the Good News, particularly to the Gentiles, he perceives what he does is nothing other than the continuing ministry of Jesus to the world. Paul's ministry is essentially God's coming to the world in Christ, since this is the only mode of God's work of salvation (John 14:6²¹). God the Father sends Christ into the world (John 6:44²²). Paul does not see what he does as his own actions, he has become an extension of Jesus Christ and continues His work in the world. Today, to say that the Church is

¹⁷ ²⁷ **Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,** ²⁸ **Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,** ²⁹ **“Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;** ³⁰ **for my eyes have seen your salvation,** ³¹ **which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,** ³² **a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”** NRSV.

¹⁸ **Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”**

¹⁹ **“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** NRSV.

²⁰ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

²¹ **Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** NRSV.

²² **No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.** NRSV.

sent into the world is to say that Christ is coming into the world (2 Corinthians 6:1-2²³).²⁴

This christological vantage point explains the “why” of the mission of the Church. The mission of Evangelism is the mission of God, a mission that His Church carries forward as an extension of His arm and His will and His Son. There is no doubt that men when they have been released from the oppressive tyranny of guilt, shame, and fear of judgment, and are released from the pointless and baseness of idolatry they have a deep sense of gratitude toward God. There is certainly nothing wrong with this sense of gratitude being in the heart of those that carry forward the mission of God to evangelize, but it must not be the central motivation, or all that serves as motivation, or its source is incomplete and hollow, devoid of the true power and source of motivation to evangelize.²⁵

²³ **As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!** NRSV.

²⁴ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

²⁵ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.

There is certainly nothing with seeking to spread the message of Christ out of a desire to rescue others from the same tyranny that we once faced, but that is a peripheral reason and not again the central reason of “why.” Firmly believing in the mission of Christ as the instrument of God’s redemption of the world is great, but again it is not the core reason for “why” the Church evangelizes. Certainly the people of the early Church were concerned about the people around them that were in danger of losing their souls, but this was again not the primary impetus for their mission. It is certainly a peculiarity of the Christian faith to call people to love those who hate, them, persecute, them and kill them. This after all stands at the core of the being and mission of Christ who died for the world when it was hostile and His enemies (Romans 5:6-8²⁶).²⁷

The Church is called to continue to be Christ in the world, to be His arms and legs and feet. We are called to love those who hate us , ridicule us and spit upon us. We are called to live out

²⁶ **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.** NRSV.

²⁷ William C. Weinrich, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 45:1 (1981), pp. 61-75.



again the life of Jesus day by day as His message continues to grow. We are called to evangelize through the power of God's Spirit who continues the work of God and implements the plan of God. We are not alone in our own strength and the plan is not ours, but His. We are called to be faithful each day in delivering our wills, and our lives into His hand to be spent as He sees fit. We are called to share in the suffering, pain, and hardship of Jesus, to take up our cross and to follow Him.

Synopsis

In this lesson we seek to explore “why” the Church is called to evangelism. Often today, the Church has forgotten that central to their identity as Church is the mission of taking the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. It is truly only in this mission that an entity can truly be called Church in the sense that we have this term used in the early years of the Christian faith. “Why,” and the Church’s identity are intricately wrapped together with each other. Without this central mission the Church does not in reality exist as the Church of Jesus Christ. To be Church is to pursue the mission of evangelism.

As the Church pursues this mission they continue the plan of God that we see in Jesus Christ; in His birth, life, death, burial and resurrection. God fulfilled His most powerful and important work in Jesus. The Church continues to extend the reach of that work in the world through the empowerment of the Spirit of God. People provide hands, feet, bodies while the Spirit of God provides power, direction and results. Our part is to submit our hearts, our wills, our bodies to the will of God. We act as His physical agents

on a spiritual mission that will lead everything to change, to transformation, to renewal.

Our central motivation must stand at the heart of our calling, but we also are emotional creatures that seek to love God in our service, to love others and to be a part of the rescue plan of God. We all know from what we have been redeemed and we would have none remain in that place. We have the privilege and honor of walking alongside our Father in redeeming the world. We learn these things from seeing “how” and “why” the early Church evangelized. Our hope is the same hope as their hope. We have hope in the resurrection from the dead and this hope stands at the heart of our very being and of our mission. In this hope we can do all things, be all things, endure all things, be a part of the redemption of all things

Questions

1. Why do you think understanding the motive for doing something is important?
2. What is your view of how God works in the world today?
3. What role do you see the Spirit of God undertaking in the creation of the world?
4. Why do you think we are so hesitant to talk about the Spirit?
5. What are some decisions that you have made in your life that indicate you are a disciple of Jesus Christ?
6. What are some things in your life that need to change in order that you can live your life more fully devoted to the mission of God to carry the Gospel message to the ends of the earth?
7. How do you see yourself as being involved in the mission of God?
8. What are some ways that you make it clear that the mission of God is the central driving force in your life?
9. What are some ways that Broadway could better equip and encourage you in our mission to evangelize?
10. How does your attitude affect how effectively you work toward spreading the Gospel, or inhibit it?
11. What are some ways that we can change our Sunday activities to more clearly project the importance of our mission of evangelism to the forefront?
12. What are some ways that the hostility of the world to Christianity might actually make the Church more effective in its mission?

13.What are some ways that people blame others for the Church not being effective today in evangelism?

14.What are some things that you do each day to allow God to speak into your life and challenge you to be more effective and bold in evangelism?

15.Why are people afraid to evangelize?

16.Why is it more important for us to be liked and appreciated by men rather than commended by God?

17.Who are some people that can help you be more devoted to God and His mission to evangelize?

18.What are some ways that you show people that you love them?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that a person cannot truly be a disciple of Jesus and fail to evangelize. To be a disciple means to seek to be like Jesus, and Jesus devoted His life to spreading the message of the love of God to the ends of the earth. God did not leave us as orphans to fulfill this mission on our own. He calls us to love people and His Spirit empowers change in the hearts of people. What are some ways that the Spirit has worked in your own life changing you to be more like Jesus?

Where is God in these words?

So many times we express evangelism in terms that make it sound like our service of God rather than our walking with God. This difference is huge. When we understand the nature of our mission we realize that all things are possible and that we should not be afraid of failure. This is not about us, it is about God working in the world and He allows us to participate and He calls us as His children to join Him in His work. What is the one place in this world where you feel the closest to God? Why?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

Recognizing that the call of Christ for our life is not about taking out an insurance policy like life insurance, but it is answering a vocation, a life path changes that everything. So often it has been the case that to be a Christian was seen as normal, preferable, and encouraged by society, but that is changing. The early Christians did not have this luxury and as is often the case with luxuries they can make us fat and lazy. It cost something for Jesus to do what He did; it cost Him His life. It should, and must, be the same for His disciples today. What are some ways that you call on Jesus to direct your life each day?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to recognize that to accept Christ is to lay down control of our life and give it over to another, to Jesus. As we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are handing our life, our dreams, our hopes to Him. We are calling upon Jesus to take possession of our lives to take over control of our destiny. This is not a call to pleasure, an easy life, or luxury, it is calling to hardship, sacrifice and even death for the mission of God. There is no health and wealth Gospel in the calling of Jesus. He calls for us to have a hope in the resurrection that empowers us through this life into the next. What are some ways that you allow Jesus to live in you?