

THE PRIMACY OF EVANGELISM

We are greatly encouraged by the increasing emphasis which Southern Baptists are placing on evangelism. Evangelism has made them what they are and it must preserve them. That so much is being said about evangelism is a most encouraging sign. The fact that our people are thinking and praying about it is indeed hopeful.

I. The Meaning.

While the Greek word, "uangelisto" (evangelist), is used only three times in the New Testament, "uangelizo" (to evangelize), is used fifty-two times, and "uangelion" (the gospel) is used seventy-four times. Evangelism is a beautiful word. It is the proclamation of the good news of God in Christ with a view to winning others to faith in Christ as their personal Saviour and fidelity to Him as their Lord and Master. The best news that has ever been told is that God has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves, namely, provided a Saviour for us. This good news can be summarized in one matchless statement: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures." This is the best news for our broken-hearted, sinning, suffering and dying humanity.

Every Baptist individual, church, institution, agency, minister and missionary are the result of evangelism. Where our people have failed to win souls to Christ, their churches have died or are dying. A church must evangelize or perish. What breath is to the body, and what the soul is to a person, evangelism is to the church. What color and fragrance are to the flower, what water is to the sea, and what power is to the engine, evangelism is to the church. Evangelism is not optional. It is imperative.

This world has many needs today, but they are all summed up in the need for an aggressive, militant, New Testament, Holy-Spirit-filled evangelism. We sorely need an intense and ceaseless evangelistic effort in and through all of our churches.

What a pity that Christians do not work more at the main task, which is that of winning lost souls to Christ. Evangelism is the first duty of Christians and the world's only hope. Soul-winning is the primary function of a church. It is given first place in the Commission—"Make disciples." Pointing lost souls to Christ is our principal business. The paramount concern of the Christian should be the same as that of his Lord, Who said plainly that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He also said, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Christ came to save the lost, and He has chosen us to carry on the great work of soul-winning in His name. Our supreme task is to rescue the perishing, and Satan's supreme desire is to hinder us or to prevent us from performing this task. We should fear anything which chills our ardor, or which hinders our effort in the glorious business of soul-winning.

Surely the one thing which we need at this time is a new realization of the supreme business entrusted to us. The first business of every church, preacher and Christian is to win people to the saving knowledge of Christ and to service for Him. The winning of lost souls to salvation in Christ is the most important thing in life. He who has been the means, under God, of winning someone else, or some others, has attained to the highest usefulness of which the human being is capable on earth. This is the main business of all our churches.

Every New Testament church needs a minister who will stand up in the pulpit and open his mouth boldly to make known the message of the gospel; a minister whose message concerning God and Christ and man and sin and salvation will carry home to the minds and hearts of the hearers, because that message is based upon the Word of God, and has been found true in his own experience. But every church needs more than this. It needs men and women in its membership who have been born again, and who by God's

grace are willing to live the Christian life, to bear the Christian witness, and to do Christian work. One of the great weaknesses of our present-day churches is that they have delegated the soul winning work to the preachers and a few missionaries, whereas every Christian should be an unceasing worker in trying to get others to repent of sin and to accept Christ as Saviour. Evangelism must have primacy in the program of our churches.

II. The Message.

The message for our times is the glorious gospel of the grace of God. Christ's gospel is not concerned with what men should do, for there is no good news in that for any sinner, but it is concerned with what God has done already for the sinners. It is the announcement of the fact that He has provided righteousness for unrighteous men. His gospel is called "good news" because to those who are under the curse of imputed sin, it carries the knowledge that they are given the opportunity to escape the curse of death.

With the exception of Christianity all religions speak of salvation by character or by conduct. They hold out the hope of earning salvation by merit of one kind or another. But, salvation by conduct or by works is the doctrine of Satan, no matter by whom nor where it is preached. Christ alone can save. Salvation is not a matter of merit on the part of the receiver, but it is entirely a matter of grace on the part of the Giver. Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. Man must accept salvation as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. This fact is illustrated in a statement by Dr. Alexander Maclaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh. Not long before Dr. Maclaren's death, his associate minister, Mr. Gustart, visited him and inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Dr. Maclaren replied, "I'll tell you what I'm doing, brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, and all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard and swim to glory on the plank of free grace." Man's only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wonderful news to hear that God has done for us that which we could not do for ourselves.

III. The Messengers.

Evangelism is not only supreme in its importance; it is supernatural in its nature. To win a soul to Christ is a supernatural assignment which demands supernatural equipment. Without it, the work is impossible. Our Lord said, "Apart from Me ye can do nothing." It is possible to get people to "make decisions" and to "join the church" by the use of salesmanship techniques or other carnal methods, but the person who, by any such method, endeavors to lead a lost soul into the experience of redemption is doomed to failure. The soul-winner must be spiritually prepared and supernaturally equipped. What the preacher is before he goes into the pulpit is more important than what he says in the pulpit. What the soul-winner is in his spiritual life and relationship to God is much more significant than anything he may say or any method he may use. Let us not go forth with the wrong weapons. Acquire all the skill you can in soul-winning techniques, but, above all else, have a relationship to God and a dependence upon His Spirit which will give you the divine enablement for this divine business.

What is the spiritual equipment or qualifications which the soul-winner must have?

1. A personal experience of redeeming grace.

We must know that way over which we are to lead others. Moddy said: "To introduce two persons successfully one must know them both." Spurgeon said, "God will not use dead tools for working living miracles."

2. A conviction of the sinner's need.

John 3:18, 36. We must believe that men are lost. There is no use in throwing

a life-line to a man on dry land. The realization that, apart from Christ, men are hopelessly and eternally lost was a powerful motivation in the lives of all the great soul-winners of history. More than a million Kentuckians above nine years of age have never made any profession of faith in Christ. Everyone of them needs Christ.

3. A conviction that Christ is the only and all-sufficient Saviour. Since men are lost, they need a Saviour. Christ is fully adequate for the needs of every sinner.
4. A working knowledge of the Scriptures.
II Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17. Dr. Torrey said, "There are four reasons why every worker should know his Bible:
(1) To show men their need of a Saviour.
(2) To show them that Jesus is the Saviour they need.
(3) To show them how to make this Saviour their Saviour.
(4) To deal with specific difficulties which stand in their way of accepting Christ."
5. A consistent Christian life.
II Corinthians 6:17. "God does not demand a beautiful vessel for His work, but He does demand a clean one." If one is not consistent in his life, the more he keeps his mouth shut about Christ the better it is for Christ and His cause. "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." What one is counts far more than what he may say with his lips or do with his hands. Live close to the Lord, if you would win souls to Him.
6. A love for souls.
Peter said, "Above all things be fervent in love." Some soul-winners have an air of pugnacity about them. They go about their work like boxers and seem to enjoy pommeling those they contact. Referring to a person of this type, a man said, "He not only sends us sinners to hell; he enjoys doing so." There is no substitute for a heart of love and tenderness. The German philosopher and poet, Heine, one day stood in the Louvre before the statue of Venus of Milo. He was in a mood of disillusionment and despair, and he said to Venus, "Ah, yes! I suppose you would help me if you could, but you can't. Your lips are still and your heart is cold." Isn't that an accurate description of many of us who ought to be effective soul-winners? Thousands of needy ones are looking wistfully to Kentucky Baptists and saying what Heine said to that marble statue, "I suppose you would help me if you could, but you can't. Your lips are still and your hearts are cold." And, in this matter of witnessing to the lost, if our lips are still, it is simply because our hearts are cold.
7. A genuine prayer life.
James 5:16. Intercessory prayer works wonders. Plead with God for men, and then go plead with men for God. Prayer alone unlocks the door and opens the way.
8. A complete dependence on the Holy Spirit.
There will not be any power in our testimony unless the Holy Spirit blesses and uses it.
9. A tactful approach.
Tact means sanctified common sense. It means the ability to say the right thing at the right time to the right person in the right way. Show a deep and sincere interest in the welfare of others.
10. A persistent effort.
No work requires so much patience and perseverance as soul-winning. Refuse to

give up because of failure at the first attempt. Keep on keeping on. Show the sinner his need of Christ, teach him the way to Christ, and persist until you bring him to Christ. The greatest thing you will ever do is to lead another person into a personal experience of redeeming love and grace. Concerning this tremendous and glorious task, George Wallace Scott gives us some encouraging words in his poem, entitled, "KEEP POUNDING AWAY."

He hammered and pounded from day to day,
At a great hard rock, till his hair turned gray.
And the folks who watched said, "What a fool"
But he kept pounding the old steel tool.

And then one morn he began to sing--
As he burst the hard old flinty thing;
For right in the middle was a chunk of gold
So big, its value could not be told.
And the old man said, with a cheery grin--
"Ef yuh jest keep poundin, yer bound t'win."

So I've determined, by the will of God:
And the cleansing power of Jesus' blood,
To keep on pounding at the hearts of men
With the Word of God, by voice and pen:

Till my Lord above, says, "that will do--
Come home, old man, your work is through.
Your battered tools of love, lay down:
Receive, your robe and starry crown,
And if some souls should go to hell,--
You did your best for Emmanuel."

IV. The Motives.

The motives that constrain us to evangelistic endeavors are as wide and varied as the whole earth, as inclusive as the needs of men, as lofty as the love of God, as deep as the pit of hell, as broad as time, and as long as eternity.

1. The command of Christ.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." If we love Him, we shall strive to please Him.

2. The condition of people.

Without Christ people are lost in sin. If we love them, we will strive to win them to Christ.

3. The welfare of the churches.

If we really loved our churches and wanted to see them grow, we would do more to win the lost to Christ and church membership.

4. The desire for personal blessings.

Among these blessings are the greatest possible joy, personal fellowship with Christ, and the fulness of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

V. The Methods.

The methods of evangelism vary. Among them are the following: Gospel sermons, Bible teaching, family influence, saved friends, and personal work. Christ used

personal work extensively and urged all His followers to do like wise. Personal evangelism--the believer in Christ witnessing to and working with the lost sinner--is the most effective method. It is mathematically correct, is ordained of God, and is the program of the Holy Spirit. The days are upon us as never before when we are flung back on personal evangelism. We are to the place where we are compelled to tread the road marked out for us in the New Testament of personal evangelism. We must fish where the people are if we ever expect to catch them. The masses of the unsaved do not attend the church services. We must contact them where they are, or they will never be reached for Christ. Success is possible, but we will have to pay the price for it. The response to the public appeal of the preacher will be in direct proportion to the personal work of the people.

Any evangelism which is not Christ-centered and church-centered is not the New Testament type. Union meetings are never of the New Testament type. I challenge you to produce the record of any church growing great and strong and virile through union revival meetings. If we are to expect the blessings of the Lord upon our efforts, we must comply with His expressed wishes in the matter.

The fields are truly white unto harvest; the time is short; the need is imperative. To the end that our people might be saved, that our churches might live and grow, that Christ might be honored and glorified, let us henceforth give ourselves to the main task for which every minister of Christ is called, and every church exists--scriptural, Spirit-filled evangelism, the hope of the world.

"The World's Bible"