

NEW TESTAMENT EVANGELISM

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

This is a day which demands that something should be done. Both the vast opportunities and the tremendous potentialities of the space age require that Christians should be up and doing. This is a time for sterling action. If Christians do not bestir themselves as the whole world faces what the philosophers describe as "the predicament that precedes death," then they may be guilty of the supreme betrayal. They may fail their Lord in the final hour of crisis, as His disciples did in the days of His flesh. God's children cannot afford to be apathetic or even complacent in such an hour as this.

The overriding commission that is laid upon Christians is to evangelize. This essential outreach is the top priority of each church. It is our basic business. To His children God has entrusted the task of telling others about Him and the salvation that is in His Son Jesus Christ. We must not be idle. We dare not be silent. We must work while it is day, for "the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Evangelism is God's word for this hour, and it must be put into practice.

As we consider the Bible basis for this urge to evangelize, we turn to an instructive incident in II Kings 7:1-11. Let us seek to visualize the scene. This is a news flash from a wartime siege. Benhadad, King of Syria, had surrounded the city of Samaria with his powerful battalions. He had sufficient strength and adequate provisions to compel submission. He determined to sit it out and simply waited for hunger to drive the Samaritans to surrender. The citizens were reduced to such dreadful straits that it seemed only a matter of time before the surrender was made.

But the messenger of God intervened with an almost incredible promise of hope. The prophet Elisha realized that this evil was God's threatened punishment for the unfaithfulness of Israel. God does not warn in vain. What He says He will do, He does. His forebodings are not empty. He fulfills His word in wrath as well as in mercy. We shall do well to remember that today, when there is such widespread flouting of His laws and blaspheming of His name.

Now that the blow had fallen, God's people recognized His hand of correction upon them. He graciously proceeded to deliver them out of all their distresses. Elisha was able to announce that the siege was soon to be lifted and that by the morrow prices in the market of Samaria, which had soared to fantastic heights because of the famine, would have returned to normal. Although this news seemed to be utterly unbelievable, it nevertheless proved to be the sober truth. The Syrians vanished in a single night, leaving all their food and equipment as unexpected spoil. God's succoring grace was obvious to all.

The first men to discover this astonishing retreat were four lepers whose usual stance was at the city gate, where they begged alms from the passers-by. In the emergency they were faced with starvation, since no one had provisions to spare for such unfortunates. So in the end they decided to desert to the Syrians.

They could hardly be worse off than they were already. In the evening twilight, they stole down to the camp of the enemy. When they reached it, to their amazement all was silence. The Bible says, "When they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, there was no man there" (II Kings 7:5). The tents were empty and all the food and drink and silver and gold and raiment were left intact as the enemy fled in panic haste. Why the Syrians had taken flight those lepers could not tell. They simply recognized that it was the Lord's doing and therefore marvelous in their eyes.

The four took counsel together. As they eyed the spoils they said, "We do not well." This was much too good to keep to themselves. They must let everyone know the news. They said, "This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace" (II Kings 7:9). Then they made their concerted resolution: "Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household" (II Kings 7:9). They realized that such good news would not keep. It must be conveyed to all the royal retinue, so that everyone might rejoice in the victory and divide the booty.

This dramatic story from God's Word leads us right to the heart of evangelism and its challenge today. As Christians we have good news to tell -- the best news in all the world, the gospel of salvation. We must not hold our peace. We dare not keep it to ourselves. It must out, and we must out with it. We must obey the divine command to go and tell.

I. The Meaning Of Evangelism.

Evangelism is a beautiful word. A definition of evangelism may be arrived at from a study of five Greek words found in the New Testament.

1. Euaggelidzo.

It means, "I preach glad tidings." It is our word for "gospel." Christ used it when He said, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

2. Karuso.

This word was used in connection with Jesus, John, and others. "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel" (Matthew 4:23). Karuson means "to herald." It is a picture of a messenger of an ancient king going from village to village making known a decree of the king.

3. Didasko.

This word is used more often than any other in describing the evangelism of Jesus. "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues" (Matthew 9:35). He explained the great spiritual truths in conversational fashion.

4. Martus.

This word means "witness." "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). A witness is a proof, an evidence. In effect Christ said, "Ye are My proofs that Christianity is real. You are living credentials." A genuine

New Testament witness is dedicated to one task. His aim is to witness for Christ at all hazards.

5. Mathatas.

This word means "to disciple." Christ said, "Go ye therefore, and teach (disciple) all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The word disciple carries with it the idea of converting. It means more than just leading a person to become a Christian. It also means to instruct him. It means to make of him a learner, a student. It means to fulfill all that is embraced in discipling.

So evangelism is the proclamation of the good news of God in Christ with a view to persuading others to place their trust in Christ as Saviour and to be faithful to Him as their Lord and Master. Making Christ known to lost sinners is the primary task of every Christian. Our supreme business is to tell others about the Saviour. Something is wrong with any professing Christian who does not try to introduce lost souls to Christ.

II. The Message Of Evangelism.

It is the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ's gospel is not concerned with what men should do, for there is not any good news in that for any sinner, but it is concerned with what God has done already for sinners. It is the announcement of the fact that God has provided righteousness for unrighteous men.

It is wonderful news to hear that God has done for us that which we never could have done for ourselves. His glorious gospel consists of three facts: Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, and Christ arose. This is the message that men need. No other message will do. It is sinful to withhold this message. We should deliver this message earnestly, tenderly, prayerfully, and expectantly.

III. The Motives To Evangelism.

According to the New Testament, we must evangelize in response to:

1. The appeal of God's Word.

God speaks through the Bible, the channel through which He still makes known His purpose. To every Christian Christ says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." Every believer is required and expected to witness for his Lord. God's Word commands it. That is the primary and in itself the sufficient reason for evangelism. God says for us to witness for Christ to the unsaved. That is enough for us. His words are binding. "What He says we must do. Where He sends we must go."

God commands us to tell others what He has done in Christ. We are not only to show them that they are sinners, but also that they have been bought at a price, redeemed at measureless cost, and invite such as the

Holy Spirit prompts to believe to claim their interest in the Saviour's blood. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17). We rejoice in the appropriateness of these familiar words of Christ to ourselves, but we should also realize that they include others whom we should reach with the good news of the gospel.

2. The appeal of man's need.

In addition to the call that comes down from God through His Word, there is also the call that comes up from man in his lost and helpless condition. The appeal of God's Word is primary and fundamental, but it is supplemented by the plea of human need. God speaks to us in this way also.

God's challenge and reassurance came to Isaiah as he contemplated the sad lot of his people. As we look upon those who are without Christ in this distracted age, we cannot remain unmoved, if we are Christians, as we see them falling far short of God's high purpose for their lives. Despite all the phenomenal advances of science in this technological society, man himself is still in a state of confusion. He is unaware of his identity. He is unable to relate himself significantly to society. Arthur Miller, in *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*, has depicted space-age man in his epitaph on Willie Loman: "Poor guy ... he didn't know who he was."

3. The appeal of Christian experience.

Evangelism is a consequence of conversion. Anyone who claims to be a Christian and is not seeking to introduce others to Christ must seriously question the reality of his discipleship. In the New Testament there were not any non-propagating Christians. Every convert became a witness.

A distinguished missionary once declared: "Some people do not believe in missions. They have no right to believe in missions. They do not believe in Christ." That forthright comment is a salutary reminder that a concern for evangelism is a direct and inevitable deduction from a saving knowledge of Christ. We cannot expect the unconverted to be interested in evangelism. How can they possibly introduce others to an experience they have never enjoyed themselves?

Those who are saved will respond to the call of their own experience and witness to others who are not saved. The fact that they have been redeemed from sin and given everlasting life will be the basis of their desire that others may come to Christ. If Jesus Christ is all in all to us, we shall want Him to be all in all to everyone. We simply shall not be able to keep Him to ourselves.

This was part of God's purpose in saving us. We were not saved for self. We were saved to witness to others and introduce them to Christ. Neglect or failure to witness for Christ to the unsaved is due to the fact that one is not saved, or that sin is in his life, or that there is a lack of love for

the Saviour. We are under constraint to witness to the unsaved.

We witness in response to the appeal of God's Word, to the appeal of man's need, and to the appeal of Christian experience.