

Evangelism at the Crossroads

prayer

So... today I want to discuss something very relevant to the upcoming Crossroads music in the park event.

We will have an opportunity to showcase Jesus Christ to an amazing community! Make no mistake though it is also a lost and hurting community.

This is a straight talk sermon about what Jesus did to win people to his church.

Let's get started...

I have been thinking about this for a few years now and I have come to a few conclusions that I would like to share with you this morning.

- Evangelism is one of the most intimidating things to participate in for many Christians
- Evangelism gives some people chills others it gives nightmares
- Evangelism is not optional for us as Christians it is His command to us
- We are called to evangelize the world, but before we go there into the abstract of the missionary calling, know that we are all called to evangelize

What do you suppose is the cause of this reluctance?

- Apathy
- Laziness
- Fatigue
- Incomplete knowledge
- Self-Centeredness

I would assert to you that today it is Fear!

We have been over many times that fear is a choice, albeit a very difficult one to overcome. This fear is primarily rooted in pride. Yes, I said pride.

- Nobody wants to be rejected
- Nobody wants to be embarrassed
- Nobody wants to be thought of as a kook or a fool
- Nobody wants to have people laugh at them
- Nobody wants to have conflict
- Nobody wants to be politically incorrect

In fact, few want to recognize that you simply don't have to agree with everything in a person's belief structure or in their lives to love a person and meet their needs

Matthew 28:18-20 CEV says:

Jesus came to them and said:

I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth! Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have told you. I will be with you always, even until the end of the world.

He said: "Go!" what makes us think that it is okay to disobey God?
Why do many Christians today think that this does not apply to them?

The fact is that many of us have allowed fear to cloud our perceptions. We have allowed the enemy to deceive us. Hundreds and even thousands are won to Christ everyday in many places in the world. So why have we seen such a huge reduction in pastors, church members and converts here in Canada and in the USA?

Let me throw some powerful ideas your way...

In order for us to have a real opportunity to bring Jesus into the forefront of people lives we need to be able to show them something that they want. We have to be attractive in some way for people to want to engage. I am not talking about compromising the gospel or telling people what they want to hear.

Friends, I am talking about us as a church and as individuals.

We are coming into a time when our faith in Jesus and our Christianity will be tested. Are we committed to Jesus? I'd like to proceed forward believing that we all are.

So where does that leave us? Some things the church teaches are not socially popular and may even go against some conventions of society. This leaves us with two choices:

- Hold fast to what God says in his word
- Compromise our walk and beliefs

Folks, we can have amazing plans; programs, courses, fun nights and everything else under the sun to engage fellowship. The word says that unless He builds the house we labor in vain. What this means is that we can't do His work of evangelism without his involvement and his methods.

It is the Holy Spirit that draws people to Christ. Our words, fellowship and love all have a huge impact, but it is the Holy Spirit that draws, so we follow God's methods.

I have been thinking about all our programs and I am happy and see many instances of limited success, but success none-the-less. So the question becomes, why aren't these programs having more success?

So how do we attract non-Christian believers to the Church and to Jesus?

Do we compromise our message? – Jesus didn't so that's not the way

Do we deceive ourselves into believing that the spiritual famine is happening because we will not compromise our message and so it is right to not have new Christians accepting Jesus?

Let me tell you what grieves my heart about the perceived apathy in our churches towards evangelism. It tells the un-churched, unsaved, lost and hurting that the church doesn't care enough to reach out to them. Does this indicate a problem with the message or the messenger?

Far too often people get confused and see themselves as rejected instead of the message.

You know what I believe grieves God's heart. The spirit of control seeks to stop the church from reaching out to the community. There are churches out there that don't want their church to grow because they are self-centered. It is simple, they are comfortable the way they are and they don't want anything that rocks the boat or takes them from their comfort zone.

But for most I believe that the answer is fear.

Why?

- Fear paralyzes
- Fear causes insecurity which allows rejection to take hold
- Fear of insufficient knowledge

There are some false perceptions out there. Some believe that they can escape their responsibility by handing it off and saying: "God will do it" or "Let's hire someone to do it"

So now that we have looked closely at the problem what is the solution?

Well... Jesus used a few principles to attract people, which gave him opportunity to reach out to the lost that he loved. To be effective, I assert that we need to examine how Jesus did it.

I have said this a thousand times, but still it bears repeating: "WE MUST LOVE ALL PEOPLE" Jesus attracted people because of his compassion and his unconditional love for them

Let me give you a couple of scriptural examples:

Matthew 14:13-14 CEV

After Jesus heard about John, he crossed Lake Galilee to go to some place where he could be alone. But the crowds found out and followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus got out of the boat, he saw the large crowd. He felt sorry for them and healed everyone who was sick.

We clearly see his compassion here for the sick

Matthew 9:35-38 CEV

Jesus went to every town and village. He taught in their meeting places and preached the good news about God's kingdom. Jesus also healed every kind of disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them. They were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in."

Jesus wants his message taken seriously by his children and shared with the lost because he loves them too.

Many times I have heard the doctrine that Jesus only came to save a limited number of people that he foreordained to be called to him. In short, he didn't come to die for all mankind and he didn't give those called a choice. Sorry folks, couldn't disagree with this more. Why?

1 Timothy 2:4,5

God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth, which is, there is only one God, and Christ Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God. Jesus was truly human, and he gave himself to rescue all of us.

When you see the people in town that are homeless or have drug problem or broken home lives or are simply poor, do you see them as losers or somehow less important than yourselves? Jesus looked at them with love, unconditional love, he did not think less of them... what he did was show them love and compassion.

So... Is compassion really important or not?

Well... God put himself in our place and He knew that we could not atone for our own failings and so in his compassion he sent Jesus his Son, to make things right between us and him.

When we are receptive to God's voice and his will, he will sometimes place a burden upon your heart

Romans 9:1-3

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises

We are called to feel and to care... If we don't there is something wrong.

Do we have this love and compassion?

Do we have the zeal and enthusiasm for Jesus that we should?

Do we have the love of all people?

Do we love Jesus?

Do we have the right attitude towards the lost?

Are we:

- Obnoxious
- Condescending
- Hostile
- Judgmental
- Fearful
- Selfish
- Obligated
- Discouraged

Are we prepared? Let's get definitive

1 Peter 3:8-17 tells us:

Finally, all of you should agree and have concern and love for each other. You should also be kind and humble. Don't be hateful and insult people just because they are hateful and insult you. Instead, treat everyone with kindness. You are God's chosen ones, and he will bless you. The Scriptures say, "Do you really love life? Do you want to be happy?"

Then stop saying cruel things and quit telling lies. Give up your evil ways and do right, as you find and follow the road that leads to peace.

The Lord watches over everyone who obeys him, and he listens to their prayers. But he opposes everyone who does evil." Can anyone really harm you for being eager to do good deeds? Even if you have to suffer for doing good things, God

will bless you. So stop being afraid and don't worry about what people might do. Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life.

Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope. Give a kind and respectful answer and keep your conscience clear. This way you will make people ashamed for saying bad things about your good conduct as a follower of Christ. You are better off to obey God and suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong

Except from a sermon by J. Anselmi on this subject:

In Psychology class we learned about this thing called Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Basically it says that we have different levels of needs and until one level is satisfied, we cannot get past that level.

- He draws it as a pyramid.
- At the bottom are the physiological needs (air, food, water, sleep, etc basic human needs)
- then you have safety and security
- followed by loving and belonging,
- Esteem and self-esteem
- Self-actualization (self fulfillment)
- A person is concerned with the level they are. If your safety is threatened, you cannot worry about feeling loved, or if you are starving, you are not worried about self-esteem.
- I am not promoting Maslow, but I do think there is some truth in what he says. Jesus knew this principle also.
- What did Jesus do for people before He taught them? He took care of needs. He found out what their needs were and addressed them. Jesus earned the right to be heard!

When you look at the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, you will see that they did not try to cram a message down people's throat without regard for their needs.

MAT 15:30-32 And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. And Jesus called His disciples to Him, and said, "I feel compassion for the people, because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way."

Jesus did not make people feel bad because they had a need, He did not judge some needs as being more legitimate than others

Jesus often met a felt need in order to establish a beachhead for evangelism in a person's life.

A hungry hurting person does not want to hear a message unless you earn the right to share it with them.

Now... here this!

Studies have shown that 70%-90% of all people who come to Church because a friend or relative invites them. This happens because a friend or family member has the respect of a person because they have been there for the good times and the bad.

Finally, we should note that Jesus related His gospel to people in a way that was meaningful and comprehensive to the masses. Matt 7:28 tells us that they were amazed at this teaching. Matt 22:33 tells us they were astonished at His teaching. Yet friends he only spoke the truth. He did not dilute his truth.

Let me share a personal grief with you in this area. My heart is saddened by the very concept that truth is relative. There are too many preachers and Christian brothers and sisters that get sucked into this lie. Hear me this morning...

Thus saith the Lord God of Hosts: "Truth is truth"

That said also note that Jesus accepted and loved people. He never compromised his message nor did he accept sinful actions. But... Jesus always confronted their sin with love.

Our lord Jesus always related his truth to the lives of those around him, so that they could connect with his message. People want real.

Today let us resolve to be THE CHURCH! Let us be the church that is known for loving people. Let us be known for the church that meets the needs of the people of our community. Let us also present God's word in a relevant and meaningful way that people can relate to.

Evangelism was never meant to be done by the religious elite. It is the calling and a right of every God loving Christian.

If we are not making the effort to evangelize. Each one of us has a responsibility to reach out to the lost.

- I bet the most every one of us has a neighbor that does not belong to Jesus. We can start with our neighbor, if we all did that, then at best we will make more disciples. At worst, at least when a person dies outside of Jesus, they will not be able to say that no one cared enough to share.

- Let us be a church that loves people so much that we hurt when we know someone is lost.

- LUKE 15:7 "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."