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## A Culture of Evangelism Various Texts

**Introduction:** Turn with me in the Word to Matthew 28, Matthew chapter 28. Tonight we are going to interrupt our series on prayer to consider another area of life in the church which needs constant attention. In fact, if you ask most Christians what areas of their Christian life they need the most work in, I am guessing that the top two answers will be prayer and evangelism. So, we will jump from prayer to evangelism for the next three Sunday nights. This is obviously important for us as we have been encouraged by the Outreach Committee to take advantage of Visitor's Sunday to reach out to the lost around us. So, I want to run to the Word to see God's design and plan for evangelism so as to build a culture of evangelism here at Newton Bible that is built upon the Word and empowered by the Spirit of God.

When we think of evangelism we probably immediately think of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. We also tend to think of the personal responsibility involved in this great commission to make disciples of all nations. And if you are like me, you are also prone to guilt and shame over how little you have done, or opportunities missed, to tell others about Jesus. What I want to do over the next three sermons on evangelism is make the case for a culture of evangelism within the church. So, you might ask, what is a culture of evangelism – which I hope to define tonight. And then next week we will talk about developing that culture more and more here at Newton Bible, which will also help us define it some more as we think about how to develop it. And then, in our last time together we will consider defending this culture of evangelism from all the threats that would seek to keep us from it. So, tonight we seek to define this culture of evangelism in the church. So, we are trying to answer questions like this – what is the description of the advance of the Gospel look like in the New Testament? When the Great Commission is fleshed out in the book of Acts and explained in the Epistles, what does it look like?

When you have heard teaching and/or preaching on evangelism what has been the focus of most of that teaching? For me, I have mostly heard about our personal

responsibility or about methodology – how to do it. And those have all been good, but I think more needs to be said about the church and evangelism. I took a class in evangelism in seminary, which you would think would make me an expert – and believe me it doesn't! But the title of the class was Personal Evangelism. I don't remember ever hearing anything in the class about the connection between the Church body and the work of taking the Gospel to the World. So, we need to define evangelism and describe the way God has designed it to work.

We start in the most obvious of places, with the great commission. Matthew 18:18-20 says this . . .

This is the commission of Christ to the 11 apostles, and by deduction to the Church as a whole. You will remember that this this commission is built upon the foundation of Peter's confession in Matthew 16 where he proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responded by promising to build his church upon the bedrock of that truth. And so this promise of Jesus to build His church is given the legs, or the method, it will be by the keeping of the Great Commission, based upon His authority. And the scope of the work will always be worldwide.

And then, if you flip over to the book of Acts – that is exactly what happens. The disciples of Jesus are told by the pre-ascendant Christ that the Spirit will come upon them and give them power to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the Earth. And that is what we see happen in the book of Acts. So, where does that leave us? How do we fit into that plan and purpose of God to save some from every tribe, nation, tongue, and people? How do our evangelistic efforts fit into that? Well, the work of spreading the Gospel is not yet complete because the Lord of this Gospel has not yet returned. But our responsibility is not just personal, but it is corporate as well.

Maybe it would help us stay on track if I defined Evangelism, and then filled in that meaning with further explanation. So, here is my working definition of Evangelism:

*Evangelism is God's Work through us to redeem the lost and build the Church.*

Let's take each part of that definition and explain more of the fullness of the idea.

**I. Evangelism is God's Work (Source/Authority)**

- a. To think rightly about evangelism we must always remember whose idea and whose plan evangelism is – and that is obviously God's. He is

the source and power and authority of the spread of the Gospel. This is why Jesus, before he commissioned the 11 apostles to make disciples in all places, told them that He has all authority in heaven and earth. In other words, He is calling them to something that he is himself guaranteeing will be successful. Which is crucially important because our efforts in spreading the Gospel don't immediately look successful according to man's standards. So, we need the constant affirmation that this whole idea of spreading the Gospel is God's idea and therefore it is dependent upon Him solely and completely to guarantee its success.

- b. But, I think we need to back up a step further from there and be reminded that the salvation of a soul is a work that God alone must do. On the human side we obviously must respond to God's call to put faith in His Son, but we know from Scripture that this turning to Christ is only possible because of an internal work of grace that must happen within us. Theologians call this a monergistic work of God, not a synergistic one. We are not saved by God by cooperating with Him and helping ourselves along to choose to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. No, we are unable apart from the great grace of God to ever look to Jesus and live. And this understanding of the monergistic work of God to save a soul is so crucial to know and remember as we seek to enter into conversations with others about Christ. We need this constant corrective on our thinking that it is not our work and it is not dependent upon me, but upon the Lord who has sent me.
- c. But let me make the case further. So, let's back up one step further and consider why it is that evangelism is God's work. Why is it necessary that this salvation of a soul is entirely from God? Well, it is necessary because of the condition of mankind apart from grace.
  - i. We are brought forth in iniquity – Ps. 51:5
  - ii. We are by nature enemies of God – Rom. 5:10; 8:7-8
  - iii. We are dead in our trespasses and sins – Eph. 2:1
  - iv. We are by nature children of wrath – Eph. 2:3
  - v. We are sons of disobedience – Eph. 2:2; 5:6
  - vi. We are children of the Devil – John 8:44
  - vii. We are under sin and therefore we will never seek God, never understand God, have turned away from God, have abounded

in sin, have no fear of God before our eyes, and stand condemned under the Law of God – Romans 3:9-20

- viii. Our minds are debased (Rom. 1:28); hardened (2 Cor. 3:14); blinded (2 Cor. 4:4); futile (Eph. 4:17); darkened (Eph. 4:18); hostile (Col. 1:21); deluded (Col. 2:4); deceived (Col. 2:8); sensuous (Col. 2:18); depraved (1 Tim. 6:5); corrupted (2 Tim. 3:8); defiled (Titus 1:15)
- d. That is the spiritual state of the lost. That is what you were before the grace of God entered in and rescued you and caused you to be born again to the living hope of Christ our Lord. And this is the state of people you engage with the Gospel in the course of evangelism. So, if this is our work, some great plan put together by the church fathers and passed on to us – then we have no hope. Who can make a dead man alive again? Only God can.
- e. And this is the glorious truth related to evangelism. God does! In fact, He has chosen some from before the foundation of the world and He is at work right now to bring them to himself. And he will not fail! Beloved – that is zeal producing to the cause of evangelism!
  - i. <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. (Eph. 1:3-4 ESV)
  - ii. <sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2 Thess. 2:13 ESV)
  - iii. <sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2 Tim. 2:8-10 ESV)
  - iv. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." (Acts 18:9-10 ESV)

- f. Do you see what the Lord spoke to Paul as he faced the opposition of the Gospel in Corinth? He affirmed that He has elected many in this city to be His own, and he was not about to allow anything to stop that plan.
  - g. This is the settled confidence of the evangelist – that God is at work to build His Church by redeeming more through the witness of the church. This monergistic work of salvation is wholly and fully dependent upon God. But this monergistic work is accomplished through very human means. And this is the next part of our definition.
- II. Evangelism is God’s Work through us (Method)**
- a. The method of evangelism is us.
  - b. Acts 2:42-47
  - c. Acts 9:31
  - d. Romans 10:13-17
  - e. 2 Corinthians 5:14, 18-21
  - f. Colossians 4:3-6
  - g. Did you notice that all of these texts give both a corporate and individual aspect to the method of evangelism? Meaning, the gospel is not just a personal responsibility, nor is it merely a corporate responsibility. But rather, it is both. As Mack Stiles has said “Much of our problem with evangelism is that we don’t have a big enough view of the church. I believe that God loves the world and has a wonderful plan for evangelism: his church.”<sup>1</sup>
  - h. The commission of Christ is the commission to the Church to proclaim the Gospel to the World. If you make the commission only corporate and not personal then you end up with event-driven evangelism – a come and see model. This is where the people of the church are not talking to people about Christ, but they are expecting the institution of the church to do evangelism through events and ministries. So, just to be clear, that is not what is happening on Visitors Sunday. But this is a tendency for all of us – to think of evangelism separated from the individual and centered in the ministry of the church.
  - i. But the commission also cannot be separated from the local church – so it cannot just be individual, it must also be corporate. So, if it is

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<sup>1</sup> J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: IX Marks Series*, pg. 19.

individual only then evangelism loses its North Star and is misguided and gets quickly off course. When the goal of building the church is absent from evangelism then the method of evangelism quickly becomes man-centered and discipleship itself becomes unclear and ultimately unhelpful. This quickly devolves into easy believism where people are won to a Christ who is absent from His church and simply becomes their personal savior and quickly, their personal servant.

### **III. Evangelism is God's Work through us to redeem the lost and build the Church (Purpose)**

- a. And this is getting into the last point of our definition – that evangelism is God's work through us to redeem the lost and build the Church. That is the purpose of evangelism. Well, maybe you would say – I thought the purpose of evangelism was to save lost souls. You are right, but you are not complete in your answer. Yes the Gospel message we proclaim is a soul-saving Gospel, but that is not all the Gospel does. In fact, I would argue with you that if that is all you think the Gospel is for, then your bar is too low. The goal of God is much higher than just the salvation of souls. The goal of God is the redeeming of some from every tribe, tongue and nation through the proclamation of His powerful Gospel for the building of His Church to the glory of His Name. Do you see how that goal keeps building upon itself? It starts with the individual being saved and then added to the church and the church local joins with the church universal in the halls of eternity to cry out “Worthy is the Lamb.”
- b. So, if the ultimate goal of God in evangelism is the building of the Church to the glory of His Name, then evangelism is best practiced within the context of healthy local church life. That is exactly what we see in the book of Acts. This is what is described in the first letter to the Thessalonians. Their faith was being declared around the world because their commitment to Christ was so obvious and compelling.
- c. So, what happens when we detach evangelism from the church? Can people still be saved if you are just out there on your own winning people to the Lord? Well, yes, I suppose. But let me give you a few dangers or pitfalls of separating evangelism from the church.
  - i. You lose the focus of evangelism
    1. When we think of and practice evangelism apart from the church, then we lose the focus of evangelism. I

honestly fear that is so much of what happens with para-church ministries. They are well-meaning and well-focused on helping the church reach the lost. But because they start out apart from the church they are like 2 degrees off in their focus, and over time, this becomes catastrophic. No longer is the purpose and plan of God designing and directing their ministries. Now they are pushed along by numbers of converts or by equipping others for personal evangelism or by getting the most amount of people possible to pray and say they have received Christ. But they are absent of the church from square one, and so it is unlikely that those new converts are ever going to step foot inside a church, and I would wonder if they were ever true converts to Christ at all.

ii. You lose the fervency of evangelism

1. The next thing you lose when you separate evangelism from the church is the fervency of evangelism.

Evangelism is one of the scariest things to do. It is hard to speak boldly, clearly, compassionately to someone who is not a Christian. And we make it tougher on ourselves by bearing that fear alone. Christians unite! And unite in the Church for the fellowship of fervency to reach the lost. It is contagious to see a brother or sister taking steps to reach out when you know it is hard for them to do. So, you pray for them and you ask them how it went. And in that God is honored and magnified as the heat of Gospel fervency in one heart enflames another.

2. But if this is just something you are supposed to do on your own, then you will lose fervency and zeal and soon will be talking to no one at all about Jesus.

iii. You lose the affirmation of evangelism

1. And lastly you lose the affirmation of the Gospel. The Church is the living body of proof that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And so a main part of your witness to the lost is to get them around those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb. That means we have to develop a culture among us that is

comfortable with lost people gathering with us, and we have to create opportunities for that to happen outside of Sunday mornings, and we have to be ready to engage the lost in conversations about spiritual things when they come.

2. Read illustration from Stiles – pg. 76-78.

Conclusion: To finish out our time together tonight we are going to break up into groups of a couple of family units together, and I want you to consider the two questions on your sheet and then pray together for this culture of evangelism to grow among us.

1. Describe what you think a culture of evangelism should look like in our church.
2. Can you name some obstacles that you think are in the way of this culture of evangelism growing among us?
3. Share the name of one person you want to invite to the Visitor's Sunday, and spend a few moments praying for one another to be bold and to have opportunity to invite them to come.