

# EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

## IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

The call that Jesus gave to every one of His first disciples, as well as to those of us today, was a simple one that we have all heard and are very familiar with. It is found in Matthew 28:19 and is commonly referred to as “The Great Commission.” It states as follows, “Go ye therefore,

*and teach all nations...*” The KJV translates the Greek word “*mathēteuō*” to the English word “teach.” Actually, the Greek word “*mathēteuō*” is better translated as “to make disciples.” Therefore, in Matthew 28:19 Jesus was actually stating to His disciples that they were to “make disciples” of Jesus in every nation. How were they to do this?

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus states that this is to be accomplished by, “*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you...*” The word used in this scripture as found in the KJV for “teaching” is a different Greek word than that used in verse 19. The Greek word used here is “*didaskō*,” which literally means “to impart instruction and instill doctrine into someone.” Therefore, Jesus is telling His disciples to impart His instruction and instill His doctrine to the new believers who would believe and accept Jesus as their Messiah (the anointed One [Hebrew]), the Christ (the anointed One [Greek]), their Lord and their Savior. So what did He teach His disciples and what did He “command” them to impart to those who they were to be “witnesses” to? How were they to “make disciples?” In other words “what is the “Good News” that they were to impart?

The point that I would like to highlight is that Jesus’ main “commission” to His first disciples was that they were to go into all the nations – to the Jews and ultimately the Gentiles – and make more **disciples**. He never told them to make “converts.” Actually, the word “convert” is found only twice in the entire Bible. It is found in Isaiah 6:10 and in James 5:19. In both instances the word is used as a verb to refer to a “turning back” to God. In both instances it is in reference to repentance and turning towards God for the purpose of being restored back into relationship with Him. The word “convert” was only used as a verb, an action of repentance, and not a noun as referring to a person. I know that it may seem like a trivial point, however, I believe it is vital for effective evangelism in this hour.

If you have read other writings of mine or if you have been in any of my times of teaching, you will not be a stranger to what I am going to discuss next. The term “disciple” literally means “to change your lifestyle to that of the one you are choosing to follow.” When a person believes in and acknowledges Jesus for who He is within their life, this decision must be made with the understanding that the individual recognizes their need for God, as well as recognizing that they need to turn from their sinful lifestyle and turn towards a Holy, loving, Heavenly Father. Jesus referred to this in His first major teaching to His first followers as it applies to what it really means to be His disciple. This teaching became known as “The Sermon on the Mount” as found in Matthew chapters 5, 6, 7.

Jesus begins His teaching with, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*” (Matthew 5:3) The term “poor in spirit” simply refers to those who come to the place in their lives where they recognize their need for God. They recognize that they are woeful sinners living a life that is going nowhere without God in their lives. Once they acknowledge and “own up” to this their heart is ready to “turn towards” God. This leads them to the next “stage” of Jesus’ teaching, “*Blessed are those that mourn (repent) for they shall be comforted*” (forgiven). (Matthew 5:4) Recognizing their need for God and choosing to turn towards Him, the individual “grieves” and repents of the sinful lifestyle they were living in.

As we can see, Jesus, in the beginning of His teaching on what the lifestyle of a child of God should be, gives us the role model of how it really all begins. It begins with a desire to turn towards God. It begins with the recognition and understanding within an individual of their need to be restored back into relationship with

God. That is what salvation is truly all about. That is what Jesus first and foremost came to do. He came to restore the relationship between God and man that was broken because of the sinful nature of men.

This is the “Good News.” This is the true Gospel message. It was prophesied throughout the Jewish scriptures. It was declared on the day that Jesus came to this earth through the womb of Mary. As we read in the account of Jesus’ birth as found in Luke 2:10-14, <sup>10</sup> *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* <sup>11</sup> *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.* <sup>12</sup> *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.* <sup>13</sup> *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,* <sup>14</sup> *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* The angels sang and declared in verse 14, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* What the angels were literally declaring and rejoicing about was that through this Savior; through this Christ (Messiah); through this Lord (of lords and King of kings); the ability to be restored and to be “set at one again” with God (true peace) is now possible. God poured forth His “good will,” His mercy, grace and loving kindness towards all the people of the earth. Why? *“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.”* (John 3:16)

This Savior, Jesus, brought to Man the possibility of everlasting, or we can say, eternal life. So what exactly is this “eternal life?” In John 17:3, Jesus gives us His definition of what eternal life truly is and what it truly means. Jesus says in John 17:3, *“And this is life eternal, **that they might know thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”* He goes further in explaining His definition of “eternal life” as found in John 17:21, *“That they all may **be one**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be **one in us**: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”* Notice, that in Jesus’ definition of eternal life He never mentions a “destination.” He never mentions that eternal life really means going to heaven. No. His definition of eternal life is “relationship oriented” and not “destination oriented.” That is not to say that Heaven is not an aspect of everlasting life. It is an aspect of everlasting life because that is the place where we will be “at one” with God and Jesus for eternity. The concept of “Heaven” is not just referring to a literal place but rather it is also referring to being in His presence forever and ever and ever.

As I just mentioned, eternal life, salvation itself, is not just about a “destination” but rather it is all about a “relationship” with God, the Father and His Son Jesus. Jesus came, not just to make a way to go to heaven (which is a great perk) but Jesus came and took the form of a man, died on the cross, took the punishment for our sinful nature and then defeated death so that we could be “set at one again” in a restored relationship with a loving Heavenly Father. When we say that Jesus “defeated death” what is really meant is that He defeated “spiritual death.”

“Spiritual death” is being eternally separated from God. Separation caused by sin. Jesus defeated “spiritual death” through His horrific crucifixion and His glorious resurrection. In doing this He made a way to mend the breach in the relationship between God and every person caused by man’s sinful nature which began back with Adam and Eve in the Garden. This is actually what every believer is “saved” from. When we speak of being “saved” it not only refers to being saved from the eternal torment of hell but it really means that we have been saved from being eternally separated from God. Separation from God is “spiritual death” which when you think about it is really another aspect and definition of what “hell” is.

The writers of the Gospels actually refer to the term “gospel.” We see them use it even before Jesus’ death. We see the term “gospel” used in Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:4; Luke 9:6; etc. They referred to it as the “gospel of the Kingdom.” It is interesting to note that Jesus, Himself, used the term “gospel.” We see Him refer to His preaching of the “gospel” and the “gospel of the Kingdom” as found in Matthew 24:14; Luke

4:18; etc. When John the Baptist was in prison and sent His disciples to ask Jesus if He really was the Messiah, Jesus answered and said, *"...Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."* What was Jesus referring to when He spoke about the "gospel of the Kingdom?"

I believe it was twofold. One aspect of the "Gospel of the Kingdom" concerned the soon to come establishment of God's Kingdom rule and reign upon the earth when Jesus returns and takes His throne upon the earth. Secondly, the "Gospel of the Kingdom" was also the glad tidings of the re-establishing and restoration of the relationship between God and Man. It was the glad tidings that proclaimed the availability of God's Kingdom now coming within an individual through the Blood of Jesus, the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit in "rebirthing" a person's spirit to become born again followed by the fullness of the Spirit being poured within the believer to live the lifestyle of a "son of God." It spoke to the point concerning the "Kingdom that is now" within the believer/disciple because of their restored relationship with their God. The Kingdom has come now to the believer/disciple because Jesus is now upon the "throne" of the believer's heart where He is to rule and govern as the believer's absolute, supreme and final authority – their Lord. To those who believe in His Name and receive Jesus, He gave them "power" - the ability, the privilege, as well, as the authority - to become the sons of God. (John 1:12) This is because the "gospel of the Kingdom" has come to the heart of the believer/disciple.

That I believe is the Good News. That I believe is the true Gospel message. It is primarily and foremost about relationship and not destination. It is first about a restored relationship with a loving God. Everything else stems from this primary and fundamental aspect of salvation. Unfortunately, in our evangelism outreaches and in our evangelism programs it has become a "destination oriented" approach to the unbeliever. The approaches we use sound like the following: Do you know where you will spend eternity? Do you want to go to heaven or hell when you die? Do you know where you will go when you die? Why would God let you into Heaven? etc., etc., etc. Now, I am not saying that these are incorrect but I am presenting the thought that maybe we have our focus in the wrong place.

Many times we use the concept of "the sinner's prayer." Just to be clear, nowhere in the scriptures do we see that format used by any of the disciples in the Book of Acts or in the Epistles to the churches. Actually, the concept of the "sinner's prayer" began in the late 1800's. Again, I am not saying that using a "sinner's prayer" is incorrect as long as we lead the individual in a true prayer of repentance and understanding that giving your life to Christ involves a true lifestyle change that the individual is aware of and desires to seek after. It means becoming a disciple, not a convert. It means understanding that they are about to enter into a relationship with the One and only true God, the God of the Universe. Many times we hear terms like: "We led hundreds of people in the "sinner's prayer;" "We saved 50 souls from hell by leading them in the sinner's prayer;" etc. But what does that really mean? Did those individuals really know what eternal life according to Jesus really is?

I believe we need to return to the basic approach as found in the Gospels, the Book of Acts and the Epistles. It was an approach that was not afraid to use the scriptures. Actually, they used the scriptures to show to the Jews that their own scriptures pointed to Jesus. The result was that many believed and were brought into a restored relationship with their God. The approach was one of restoring their relationship back to a Holy God that could not be accomplished by anything they could do. It was only through the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus that was able to bring them back into that relationship. If they wanted that true, intimate, personal relationship with their God it was now possible through their Messiah, the Son of God - Jesus. It was the same approach that the Apostle Paul used when he was with the Gentiles. It was about having a relationship with a real God, who loved them and that they could actually have a relationship with instead of their inanimate gods made of silver and gold or other materials. If they, the Gentiles and pagans,

wanted a true, intimate, personal relationship with the One and only true God, it was now possible through the Son of the Living God – Jesus Christ.

This is also the heart and desire of our Heavenly Father. As disciples of Jesus, we are now to be God the Father's "ambassadors to declare to the lost that God desires to have that relationship with them even more than they may desire it. In 2Corinthians 5:19,20 the Apostle Paul states, *"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."* What this scripture is telling us is that it was God's heart of reconciliation that was in Jesus and led Jesus to do what He did to bring about the availability of relationship restored. That "God desire" for reconciliation is now deposited in every believer/disciple. Therefore, every believer/disciple is to be the Father's official representative to everyone we meet. We are to tell them the "Good News" that their God passionately desires to be in relationship with them.

I would like to suggest that when we speak to the "unsaved" concerning salvation, our approach should be primarily "relationship oriented" and not so much "destination oriented." I would like to see an approach that would ask questions to the individual such as: Do you believe or are you aware that there is a God who wants to have an intimate relationship with you? Do you think it is possible and if it was possible, would you like to have a close, intimate relationship with a loving, Heavenly Father God? The answers to questions such as these from any individual you speak to will let you know exactly where their heart is at. Questions such as those just mentioned allows for you to see if that individual is truly "poor in spirit" and recognizes their need for God and that they are ready to "turn towards Him." Their answer would reveal that their heart is "good soil" for the seed of the "Good News" to be planted in. It would reveal that the individual is ready to not only enter into relationship with a loving Father, God but also they are ready to enter into a journey of changing their lifestyle, their manner of behavior, to that of the One they are choosing to follow – Jesus.

I believe that if our approach to evangelism returns to the simple Good News and glad tidings as prophesied throughout the Jewish scriptures and declared by the angels at the birth of Jesus, that we will see the "birthing" of true disciples with true lifestyle changes. We will see the true fulfillment of Jesus' "Great Commission" – *"Go ye therefore (we as His disciples), and teach (make other disciples in) all nations... Teaching (to impart instruction and instill correct doctrine into) them to observe (to watch and learn through observation of the disciples telling them about Jesus and a restored relationship with their God) all things whatsoever I (Jesus) have commanded (role modeled, taught and exhorted) you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*