

EVANGELISM:

how the whole church speaks of Jesus

Week 2 – What Is Evangelism?

“I was a freshly minted 1970s-era Jesus freak. During the first months of my first year in college, I led my friend and roommate, John, to Jesus. One Sunday, not long after, we decided to attend the large Baptist church in downtown Memphis

The preacher preached, all stanzas were sung, and then came the invitation...John, whose head was bowed but whose eyes were opened (against instructions), whispered to me, ‘Do you think I should go forward?’ ‘Well, it can’t hurt,’ I whispered back, ‘I’ll go with you.’

Dozens ‘slipped’ out of their seats and streamed forward. Unbeknownst to us, they were mostly ushers...In a flash, the preacher was by my side, ‘Son...why are you here today?’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘my friend John here accepted Jesus a couple of weeks ago, and he wanted to stand up for Jesus.’...He nodded to John, ‘That’s wonderful, son.’ Turning back to me, he said, ‘And what brings you forward?’... ‘Well, I...wanted to support John,’ I stammered.

‘Are you a Christian, son?’ ‘I am,’ I said. ‘And would you like to rededicate your life to Jesus?’ The theological complexities of this question escaped me, so I said, ‘Well, sure, I guess.’

The preacher then pressed the microphone to his lips and stared up at the balcony...‘I’d like to say to all you in TV land, these two young men have come to give their lives to Jesus. You can do that in your home right now, where you sit...’ (20-23)

Question—Most of us are familiar with this kind of altar call. Is this evangelism?

It’s important for us to realize that many of our concepts of evangelism may be more shaped by our cultural experiences in church than what the Bible has to say. Obviously, there is no formula for how God has to save the lost—he can use imperfect attempts like Apollos (Acts 18:26) and even selfishly motivated evangelists (Phil. 1:17-18).

“Most important, even though people come to Jesus through various means, the Bible *never* uses results to guide or justify evangelistic practice.” (24)

Question—What wrong means of evangelism might we be tempted to use? What wrong motives?

Paul rejoiced at the preaching of the gospel no matter the motive. However, he also corrected twisted evangelistic practices. We must:

- not manipulate, change the message, or deceive (2 Cor. 4:1-2)
- seek pure motives in love for people and Christ (2 Cor. 5:11-15)
- trust that the Lord will add to our numbers (Acts 2:47)

So, how do we know when evangelism is happening? Well, the answer depends on how we define evangelism.

Definition—Evangelism is teaching the gospel with the aim to persuade.

“Notice that the definition does not require an immediate outward response. Walking an aisle, raising a hand, or even praying a prayer may tell us that evangelism has happened, but such actions are not what evangelism is.” (27)

Amplified Definition—Evangelism is teaching (heralding, proclaiming, preaching) the gospel (God’s message that leads to salvation) with the aim (hope, desire, goal) to persuade (convince, convert).

“Notice, too, that if any of the four components are missing, we are probably doing something other than evangelism.” (27)

Question: How can worldly desires tempt us to use manipulation, a watered down gospel, or false promises?