

# Christ's Call to Evangelism

Now that we understand that God's purpose through evangelism is to bring Himself glory by restoring man's relationship to Him, we now turn to Christ, and His call to evangelism. In outlining this call, it is necessary to both understand the call He gave us, as well as the means given to accomplish the call.

## God's Heart for the Lost

Before jumping into what Christ has called us to do, we must understand God's heart for those who don't know Him. If we can see how great the Father's love is for us, than maybe our zeal and passion for evangelism will increase.

The love of God for mankind is primarily seen in the incarnation. God sent the Son, the second person of the Trinity, into a sinful world to take on all the sins of the world. The wrath of God would now be poured out on innocent blood instead of on guilty humankind. This was done knowing that though the sacrifice was great, it would allow man to be reconciled back to the Father and have fellowship with Him again. The physical pain and agony that Christ went through was great, yet even worse was the moment on the cross where Christ experienced a sense of divine abandonment as all the wrath of God and sins of men were upon Him (Mk 15:34). The Son, who has eternally existed with the Father and Spirit, was for a moment separated from them relationally (He was not completely separated, as the Trinity cannot be broken). The incarnation, therefore, shows the incredible sacrificial love in which God has for the lost. That though we have sinned and rebelled

against Him, He has been so merciful to us in rescuing us from our own sin and rebellion.

According to the Scriptures, all three persons of the Trinity participated in creation, but I want to focus specifically on Christ's role. Colossians says that all things were not only created by Christ, but also held together by Him (Col. 1:16-17). This means that if Christ chooses, he can make anything come to an end. With this understanding, reading the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion fills me with complete amazement and a deep sadness. The One who came to rescue and save mankind was being spit on, whipped, mocked, tortured, and killed by the very people he created, the very people He allows to have life, and the very people He came to save. So it was possible for the hands of the soldiers to strip Christ's clothes off because Christ was created in such a way that joints could bend and fingers could grasp things. They were able to hit Him with a staff and whip Him because Jesus created us with strength, sight, and joints. The very glands which cause saliva to be formed were created by Christ, and the spit that was hurled on Him was possible because He allowed it. As He was on the cross, moments away from His sacrificial death, the people below yelled, mocked, insulted, and abused the One who was about to save Him. I cannot fathom being up there, doing what Christ was about to do, after how He was being treated. But He allowed it, he held together the joints of those who beat Him, the vocal cords of those who mocked Him, and everything else that was done He allowed to

happen? Why? Because God deeply loves mankind and desperately wants those who don't know Him to come to know Him.



Jesus used parables to show us the value of salvation and to make evident God's love for the lost. The value of Salvation is compared to a treasure, in that the treasure is so valuable that in joy the man sold all he had to buy the empty field that contained the treasure. Compared to a pearl, it is so valuable that the merchant sold everything he had to buy the valuable pearl (Mk. 13:44-46). This tells us that there is nothing more valuable than knowing God. So for those who don't know Him, those who are lost, Jesus tells us how much God loves and pursues them. The great lengths that are taken in the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son, to find what was lost, shows how deeply God loves and cares to save those who are lost (Lk 15). God cares deeply about those who don't know Him, and if it matters that much to God it should matter to us. The Great Commission is given to us because

God loves people, and wants this news to be shared and spread so that those who are lost so they can discover the treasure that is more valuable than anything of this world.

### **Our Commissioning**

In each of the four gospels, and in Acts, Christ has made our mission clear. He says it in different ways and in different settings, but there is no skirting around the fact that we are called to share the good news about Christ. By saying it different ways, we get insight into the different implications that this commissioning has. Our goal here is to look at the different texts and understand what they are asking for us.

*Matthew 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

This is the most comprehensive statement about our commissioning. The first thing we are told to do in this commission is to make disciples, which involves telling people the good news. It is getting people to understand why they should follow Jesus. The next part of this commissioning is baptism, which is a physical representation of an inward reality. Baptism shows that we have been given a new life through Jesus Christ and that we are entering into the community of faith (Rom. 6:3-14). After baptism, we are told to teach others what Christ has commanded. So the goal is not merely to get people in the door, but to help grow them into maturity. This commission, known as the Great Commission, is called such because it is calling us to share the good news of Christ, bring others into our community through baptism, and teach them so they can

be faithful to the Lord. The point here is that this is a continual process, where disciples are continually making disciples who are continually making disciples. Neglecting any of these steps is neglecting the Great Commission all together. We should always be preaching, always be baptizing (if Christ woos the person to Himself), and always be teaching.

*Mark 16:15-16: "And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*

In Mark we find the weight of our task. Those who do not believe the gospel will be condemned, which makes our mission urgent and vastly important. The mission declared here is to proclaim the gospel, period. The simplicity of this helps us to rely on God for conversion. At the end of the day we cannot make anyone believe, we can only share the message. Our call is to just be faithful to what God has called us to, and we see here that the task is to proclaim the glorious message of Christ to the world.

*Luke 24:45-48: "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things"*

These verses not only give us a task, but also show us the importance of scripture. The message we share is solidly grounded in scripture, which gives us confidence that it is authoritative and it is true. We also see here that repentance and forgiveness are gifts from Christ. Repentance is not something that

happens before belief, but something that happens because of belief. This is why it is proclaimed in His name, because this is something that can happen only through Christ. These verses help show us that the focal point of the message we share is not the cross, but the resurrection. I find it interesting that death is not mentioned until it is in reference to the resurrection. It is the resurrection that accomplished what Christ came to do on the cross, and it should be the focal point in the message we share. This is why in Paul's writings he devotes a whole chapter on the necessity on the resurrection (1Cor 15). Let not our proclamation be about death, but about life, and that Christ rose from the dead so that we may experience new life in Him.

*John 20:19-22: " On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

The gospel of John simply shows that we are being sent as a continuation of the work that Christ did here on earth. This is an incredible opportunity, for we are now called to do what Christ did. We are being sent to help others understand who God is and how they can have a relationship with Him. This is both an honor and a weighty responsibility, and we are to handle this task with a clear understanding of what has been asked of us.



*Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

Acts, as well as Luke 24:48, tells us to be Christ's witness. Thinking about it this way, our job is really not as difficult as we make it. Being a witness merely consists of testifying, it is telling what you know. So to be Christ's witness our job is to tell people who He truly is. A good witness doesn't leave parts of the story out nor add parts to the story. A good witness is accurate and complete in their testimony, which is what our mission is for Christ – to give an honest account of who He is and what He has done for us. Whether others believe the witness is not the responsibility of

the witness, the witness is merely to be faithful to share.

### **Equipping Us for the Call**

I would like to end this article with explaining four necessary aspects of Christ's call that allow it to be accomplished. When the Great Commission is taught, these four aspects are often neglected or minimized. My hope is that understanding this will encourage and strengthen us in our faith so we can proclaim the gospel more boldly and confidently.

1. The resurrection: Jesus Himself knew that He must first rise from the dead before He can call others to do the work of an evangelist. Each of the verses that we discussed above took place after the resurrection, and there are no Great Commission type calls before the resurrection. Coincidence? Absolutely not. It was necessary for Christ to die, be buried, and rise again, so that He could conquer sin once and for all. This is why the resurrection must be proclaimed, for it has the power to reconcile a sinful heart back to God. After all, the message that we are called to share

hinges upon the fact that He did rise from the dead.

2. Peace: Jesus' first commissioning passage takes place when the disciples are behind closed doors (see Jn 20:19-21 above). They were behind closed doors because they were afraid, for what they believed could get them killed.<sup>1</sup> Our 21<sup>st</sup> century American minds don't see the need for peace like the disciples did, but it is clear by this passage that without Jesus giving them peace, they would have stayed behind closed doors.. God gives us peace, a peace that knows that we are in God's hands and we can trust Him. We need that, for the message we share is not popular and not received well. Today, in other countries, there are stories of Christians getting beaten to death (India) or even having molten metal poured on them (N. Korea) because of their faith in Christ and obedience to Him in sharing the gospel. This message of peace is so powerful in situations such as this. It is a message that is more and more necessary the more and more persecuted we are. Jesus, the King of Kings, Lord over all, has given us peace.

3: Authority: When I ask people what word the Great Commission starts with I get one of two answers. People either say "Go" or "therefore" depending on how technical they are and what version they read. The problem is, it doesn't matter what version of the Bible they are reading, both answers are wrong. The great commission begins with "All," so read from the beginning would read: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and



<sup>1</sup> Stetzer, Ed and David Putman. *Breaking the Missional Code*. Broadman & Hollman. Nashville. 2006. 30

make disciples of all nations...” So why do I even ask the question? Why does it matter what the Great Commission starts with? Well, if you say it starts with “Go,” then the Great Commission for you begins with you, but if you say it starts with “all” than you are saying that the Great Commission begins with Jesus. We don’t just “go” and try to make disciples on our own, we go because Christ has the authority to send us. But the Great Commission doesn’t just start with Jesus, it ends with Him too. So we are able to make disciples because Christ, with His authority over all, tells us to, and because He will be with us to the end. We must remember this when we share the news, that it is being done on Christ’s authority.

4. Holy Spirit: The purpose of the gospel is so that others might be reconciled back to the Father. As we saw above, this will not happen without Christ’s authority nor without His sacrifice. But, it does not end there. There will be no fruit from the message we proclaim apart from the Holy Spirit’s work. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells His disciples that they will be His witnesses, but says that this will not happen until they receive the power of the Holy Spirit. In John 20 (quoted above) Jesus says He is sending the disciples out to share the message, then immediately says “receive the Holy Spirit.” Why would Christ not send them until they receive the power of the Spirit? Why did He tell them to receive the Holy Spirit immediately following His orders for the mission? If your commanding officer tells you that you are going into battle then hands you a gun, the natural conclusion you draw is “I am going to need this...in fact without this gun, I will be toast.” The Spirit is more important for success in evangelism than a gun is for success in a war.

Why? Because without the Spirit absolutely nothing will happen, there will be no conversion. At least if you didn’t have a gun you could use hand to hand combat. If this is true, why do we even think about doing the mission of Christ apart from the leading of the Spirit? Jesus didn’t, which is why He didn’t send the disciples out until they received the Spirit. The Spirit is essential to our mission.

### **Conclusion**

God wants to save the lost, and has chosen to use us to do it. This is a high calling, but is essential, for it is the way in which Christ has chosen to reach the world. In doing such, make clear the resurrection, be comforted by His peace, go out confident that He who has the authority has sent you, and know that all this work must be and can be done through the power of the Spirit. While doing all this, know that this is not a job for one person, but the mission of the church. So as you go out as missionaries for Christ, continue to pray for workers of the harvest, for the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few (Mt. 9:36-38)