

Thursday, September 17, 2020
SERIES: GROWING AND GOING
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TITLE: The Urgency of the Gospel Pt. 1

Hesitant. Terrified. I think this is how many of us feel about going and sharing the Gospel. When I bring up evangelism, the Gospel, and outreach, what emotions do you feel? I know you had some reaction when I said evangelism. What scenarios played out in your mind? I think if you're me, if you're like many I've pastored, you may be hesitant and a little bit terrified.

A number of years ago, I was looking for a video on YouTube. It was in regard to, I think, Fear and Evangelism. And what I discovered was there was this interview between David Platt and Francis Chan. Now, if you don't know who they are, let's just say they are the evangelists of evangelists, and what they admitted in this video shocked me. They both admitted to being hesitant, and at times fearful, about sharing the Gospel. Why do I share this with you? Why do I remind myself of this? Because even if you are passionate and have the gift, it still can be intimidating and cause fear and anxiety. I mean, what is it about sharing the Gospel that causes us such fear? It's almost as if we feel we are selling life insurance. I apologize for any insurance agents out there. I am a recovering one myself, so it's okay for me to joke. But seriously, what is it that prevents us from sharing the Gospel?

I'm just curious: In the past 6 months, have you seen a great show or movie that you really enjoyed? Great. Did you talk about it at work the next day? Who else did you tell? Right - you told everyone they should see it. Even if it wasn't a Pure Flix film, you promoted it, because for some reason, it touched you. You thought it would be beneficial for your friends to see. How about this? Have you tried a new restaurant in the past 6 months? Most likely it was take-out style, but did you discover something new? Was it good? Why was it good? Should I try it out myself? Hey, I appreciate your recommendation. Now for me, when a local hamburger joint, Honest Abe's opened up, I was a street evangelist for them. They do have the greatest burger ever. So what kind of good news have you shared about movies or restaurants lately?

Now, why aren't we doing that with the Gospel? We are quick to promote and evangelize truly trivial things: movies, food, drinks, vacation spots, books, auto repair places, you name it. These serve temporal purposes and are truly subjective in nature. So what is it in our thinking and beliefs about the Gospel - a truly objective proposition - that keeps us from sharing it? This is what I want to talk about.

I believe that today there is a true urgency to share the Gospel. But people aren't in a hurry to do this: There is a lack of urgency. We seem to think we can love on a person for an unfathomable amount of time. I can play Xbox with them for a year, before maybe sharing the Gospel. I can have dinner with them once a month, and for maybe 12 months; if it feels right, we'll share the Gospel. Some people only want to tend the soil: Show love, do an act of service, a random act of kindness - without any pressure of speaking about the Gospel. This is nice - it leaves everyone feeling good - but it stops short of sharing real hope! Most people, when pressed, tell me, "Nat, it's easy for you to say. You're a Bible teacher; you're a pastor; you're clearly an evangelist. I am not." I respond with, "It may be true. You might not be an evangelist. I may be. But you *are* called to evangelize."

It is my prayer, at the end of our time together, you'll understand that time is running out to share the Gospel. We have to develop urgency, so here's where we're going to start: **Biblical Truth #1 - We are all sinners who are in need of a Savior.**

Romans 3:23 (ESV) - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Right from the beginning of life, we are faced with a dilemma: We are all sinners. Think about King David. In Psalm 51, he was wrestling with his sinfulness. He was asking God for forgiveness. But listen to what he says, beginning in verse three. "**for I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. ⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin, did my mother conceive me.**" Did you hear what he said? From the very moment David was a human, he had a sin nature. That's true for him, and it's true for you.

DISCUSSION:

N: I think this is a good time to bring in my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, not all of us are evangelists, yet we're all called to evangelize. How have you come to terms with that in your own life?

A: You know, Nat, that's a good one, because I really firmly believe that there's no evangelism without discipleship. So really, we're called to be disciple-makers, not "dump and run". So we need to be there for people. And that changes - that perspective changes, because then you're not thinking of, "Oh, I've got to pitch people" or "I've got to drop off this tract" or - it's more of a way of living. And I really had to work on myself with that. Now I know technically, that yes, somebody can become saved, and they haven't been disciplined, then they die. Right. I totally get that. But practically speaking, there's no evangelism without some kind of discipleship, at least in my mind. So, it's a big deal to be there for people as a disciple-maker.

N: Yeah. Yeah. A lot of people will push back against that notion of something more than just a yes on the dotted line, with Jesus -right, Jesus is the golden ticket to Heaven. But anything else that comes, you know, great - if not, so be it. Some people point to the thief on the cross, right? There was no discipleship on the cross, and there was no formal repentance on the cross. And I

think that's actually completely false when you look at it. But if we're going to do it right - if we're going to do it as Jesus did it - as the apostles did, we're going to be investing in people's lives, sharing the verbal Gospel with them, and imparting on them the truths of Scripture. And walking with them, so that they can fully pursue Christ, and then go on and make disciple-making disciples. You're exactly right. Cara, I want to turn to you now - let's talk about Romans 3:23, because it's a very controversial verse, because most people today, they don't believe in sin. Well, as someone who evangelizes, how do you approach this topic of sin?

C: Well, we can't deliver good news, unless people recognize that there also is bad news. So you have to deliver the bad news that we're sinners, and that we can't make it to Heaven on our own merit. So we have to be willing to discuss bad news. And I basically open conversations with this example - and believe me, it takes a little bit to get to this point - but then I say, you don't have to teach a child to be selfish. And I feel like that puts the whole enchilada into perspective, right? Because you don't have to teach a child to be selfish. We're born selfish.

N: Well, it's like gravity. You can deny the reality of gravity, but once you jump off a roof, you're going to hit really fast. And the same is true for our sinfulness. We can call it a mistake. We can call it a boo-boo. We can call it nothing at all. The reality is, when you face consequences in your life, you really do realize that there is something out there that is sin. And I think when we take time and talk with people - and you're great at asking questions; both you and Arnie are really good at asking questions - I think a lot of times people come to those truths on their own, but it takes some time and some nurturing, and some walking alongside them. But by no means, should we, as Christians, as pastors, as evangelists - everyone who is a follower of Christ - we need to be committed to showing and sharing the whole story: The good news and the bad news. Because what was it you said? Without that bad news, what's the point of good news?

2 Chronicles 6:36 (ESV) tells us, "There is no one who does not sin."

Do you realize, since the creation of man, humankind has been sinful? Do you think someone can actually go through life without sinning? If you do, think again. Now you're smarter than that. Go observe children. Parents don't instruct their children to be naughty. There is no Sunday School that exists to instruct kids how to be bad, because sinfulness is innate to their nature. We ALL need instruction on how to be good, not bad.

Again, if you don't believe me, just go work in a daycare, or when churches are fully functional again, go work in childcare. Trust me, I have 3 wonderful boys. They may look innocent, but they are not! Little kids look so innocent. But what happens when one little kid wants that Transformer? He goes over, and he takes it from another kid, and he runs away. The little boy who is now without a toy cries for a moment - but then he gets up, walks over to the other little boy, *punches him*, then takes the toy back! You see, he wasn't taught to be naughty or sinful.

That is in his very nature. There is *no one* who does not sin. This is true for nonbelievers, and it's even true for us.

1 John 1:8,10 – “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.”

I get it. Sin has become a very unpopular term. In our politically correct culture, we do not call sin a sin. We don't even talk about sin. Our culture has slowly drifted into moral relativism. There are mistakes; there are boo-boos. When you say, “Hey, stop doing that sin.” The usual response is, “Hey, man. You can't tell me that's a sin. My truth says I can do this - in fact, it's good for me to do this.”

I see this in Christian circles today. It's not just a problem with unbelievers. It's about truth being relative. This is what makes evangelism so hard with nonbelievers. But it's *also* what makes discipleship and sanctification so hard for many Christians today. As someone who has pastored people of all ages, I know that this is a prevailing belief - that we can be a Christian on Facebook, at least by title, and we can be a Christian at church, but what happens in our personal lives doesn't seem to matter.

In fact, here are some things I have heard in my time as a pastor:

“I can go out and party with my friends on the weekend. I don't get that drunk.”

“I can live with my girlfriend. I can live with my boyfriend. Try it before you buy it, right?”

“I can take whatever I want from the supply closet. I don't get paid enough anyway. This slowly brings my pay up!”

This is the mindset of the culture we live in – Relativism - truth for you and truth for me - justification for our sins. Look at sitcoms today. The alternative, adulterous lifestyles are praised. The person who gives it to the organization, who robs and steals - that is the hero. Bad is good, and good is bad. This is why if you profess to be a Christian, you cannot hold to relativism. Why? Because absolute truth is not relative. It is objective. You're either a Christian, or you're *not* - just like you cannot be kind of pregnant or kind of dead - you are either pregnant or not; dead or alive.

So as Christians, the primary source of truth is the Bible. Now, this is true regardless if you're a Christian or not. However, the Bible to a nonbeliever is foolish - and yet we know the Bible provides freedom and life. So you don't get to exploit the grace of God as a Christian. You don't get to argue and negotiate what God asks of us.

Here's something I do with people who think they can push against God's standards. I ask them this question: “How well is this working for you?” This is a powerful question that gets them to stop and evaluate their current lifestyle choices, and the results of their choices. When they're honest, they usually say, “Not too well.” And then I ask them, “Do you know why?” and then I tell them, “Because your choices are actually sin. And do you know what sin does?”

Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Sin results in messing up everything, but the ultimate price is death. Not just physical death, but spiritual death as well.

Isaiah 59:2, “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” Your sins have separated you from the one who can love you, unconditionally. Separated from God, you are neck-deep in sin, and even in the pain and suffering, you can cry out to God for help. But unfortunately, if you are estranged from God, He won't hear you. However, don't think God is not aware of your actions. Your sinful actions are not only an offense to men, but they are ultimately an offense to God. God is good, and because He is good, He will *not* let sin go unpunished. Sin is serious business to God. It is so serious, that He would send His one and only Son to the cross to pay for it.

Again Biblical truth #1 is: We are all sinners in need of the Savior. This leads us to our **second Biblical truth: There are no do-overs.**

Have you ever died and been reincarnated? Well, I hope you said no, because no one ever has. A hard truth is that there are no do-overs. This is the only life we have. Jesus was very clear in His teaching on our one shot on this Earth. I want to read to you a lengthy passage from Luke 16. Jesus here shares a frightening but necessary story. Luke 16:19-31 (NIV):

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² “The time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire.’

²⁵ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been set in place so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’

²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’

²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’

³⁰ “‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’

³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

N: All right, let's turn to my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. What does this Bible teaching (*The Rich Man and Lazarus*) do for you, as you think about reaching the lost?

A: It's like, wow, how awful, how terrible. It's almost, at least for me, you have the desire to make it be like a fairy tale, because to want to go and reach your other friends - and the desperation - it just has a tremendous impact on the loss. And I think, and maybe it's Satan - he really can't let us think that this is literally a true story, because if it was literally a true story, we would behave much differently than how we do today: How most of us, including myself behave today.

N: That's great perspective. Yeah. It's interesting - When you read the commentaries on this passage, some people think it's a parable. Some people think it's a real story. But I think one thing is really unique about this, is the fact that Jesus never used names in parables, and yet He uses Lazarus here. That gives us a hint that there may be something more than just an analogy here, but actually this is a reality - something that is going on. And I think you're exactly right. Satan will do whatever he can to take our eyes off of the truth. And this is a scary, shocking story.

A: It's mind blowing.

N: It is. Cara, what does this do for you?

C: Well, the guy who started the Salvation Army, he said he wishes each one of his employees could be dangled over Hell, so they can, you know, really have a heart for the lost. The guy had to die in order to care about his friends that much. We're alive and we have the key to eternal life, and yet we keep it to ourselves. I mean, that's - I don't know - it just bothers me in that way. I just - I want to shake people and go, you have the cure for everything. Here's everything. I mean, the worst thing that can happen to us is the best thing that can happen to us - That's to die. We are born, you know, just - it's frustrating to think that there are people there - just bothers me. I hate it.

N: Yeah. I remember meeting a woman from China who was preparing to be a missionary to go back to her village. And she had shared the Gospel with her sister - I believe it was - and her sister was - so, for lack of a better word - offended by the Gospel. Because what it did was, it shook up her worldview so bad, that she said, "Well, if I believe this, and if this is in fact true, that means all of our loved ones - our ancestors - who've been practicing all this religion, are in Hell. Hell is a horrible place. And because of that, I cannot believe it, because everything else we pursued was false." But that's exactly what we need to do. We need to look at the reality of Hell, allow it to scare us, to remind us, to go out there and tell people the truth of it. And, you know, we get so passionate about anti-sugar, anti-eggs, because of cholesterol. And we'll tell people,

don't eat the eggs, don't eat the eggs, don't use the whatever supplement. But the reality is, we've got to show them Hell, because that is an eternal consequence. But I think as Arnie, you talked about, a little bit ago, about the truth of this - let's face it - relativism today is a big issue. The notion that truth is relative to an individual, to a culture, to a religion, you name it - truth is relative. But from your perspective, how has relativism impacted the church?

A: I think it's had tremendous impact, because we don't talk about Hell; we don't talk much about evil. We don't talk about the hard things so much, and it's just kind of, you make your way, and you make your way the best you can spiritually. And it's just kind of, mosey along.

N: You know, this whole notion of relativism, I think it has impacted the church in monumental ways. As we've talked about today, it's impacting how people view Hell and Heaven. You know, is Hell real, or is it just the consequences we live in today? Relativism has impacted the church also in how we live, right? "Hey, you know, it's probably good for you to avoid sexual immorality, but for me, you know, because I'm forgiven, you know, it's okay. I'm covered by grace." We've let relativism really impact all of Christendom. And the reality is, we need to end that today, because truth is not relative. It is objective. And it's found in God's Word; it's found in God Himself. And so we, as believers, need to come back to the Bible daily, see what is truth, and live according to it, regardless of the consequences, and the pushback we will experience today and tomorrow.