

Monday, September 21, 2020

SERIES: GROWING AND GOING

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TITLE: The Urgency of the Gospel Pt. 2

In Luke 16, Jesus is sharing an important story about the rich man and Lazarus. He is sharing this with the Pharisees, and here's what that story is about:

The rich man is in torment. And so he asks Abraham for some relief. But Abraham says, "Sorry. Not going to happen. You're dead, and you're in Hell. Lazarus is in Heaven. You can't cross over here, and we can't cross over there." So the rich man says, "Fine, but can you at least send Lazarus, a dead man, to my family? If they see him, then they'll repent." Abraham says, "Look, if they don't listen to the heroes and pillars of the faith, they will not listen to Lazarus, a dead man made alive."

So Jesus, in His story, tells us we have *one shot*. God has sent His messengers to us on this Earth. That's what we get. That's all we need. There is no second chance in Purgatory. We get no chance in the grave to earn our way out of our sin. We have no chance to tell others of the fate that awaits them. As heartwarming as Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is, there will be NO ghosts coming back from the grave to warn us to repent and turn to Christ. Today, RIGHT NOW, is our chance. So here's the overall bad news: We are sinners. We are desperately wicked, cut off from God. We are dead in our trespasses, and we need a Savior. We get no do-overs, no second chances, no way to earn our way out of our sins. This is it; this is the one shot we get. But if there's bad news, that means there's good news, right?

Of course, there is! The Good News is the Gospel – I love John 3:16 (NASB): **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** So you see, God made a way to save the lost: that is Jesus Christ - The God-man; God-incarnate. The Gospel message is captured in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Paul says this: **Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received,(and here it is: this is the Gospel) that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."**

Not only did Christ come, but he *died* as a sinless man on a cross! He was buried, and 3 days later rose from the grave. That is good news. Now, if this is such good news, why aren't we

sharing it? Why aren't we evangelizing? Are we scared? Are we unsure? Are we ashamed? Friend, if we are scared, I honestly think that's natural. Sharing our faith – sharing the Good News - it can be nerve-racking. We are talking about disrupting someone's worldview. This is deeply personal. But don't forget the truth: If their worldview is not a biblical worldview, then their worldview is *wrong*. And second, God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power!

But again maybe we're scared. Maybe we're unsure. Do we doubt our own faith? Are there questions we have? If so, consult your nearest apologist! But to be honest, it's okay to struggle and still be confident in your faith. You don't have to have all the answers. But let me assure you, your faith – a biblical faith, the Christian faith– is the most reasonable and coherent out there. *But you do need to own it*. Remember, Christianity - salvation - rests upon a relationship with God and Jesus, not religion.

So, let's do a quick review of our biblical truths about the Gospel: **#1: We are all sinners in need of a Savior. #2 There are NO do-overs.** And here's the **3rd important biblical truth** we need to remember today: **We are called to be UNASHAMED of the Gospel!**

Romans 1:16: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Think about this: Here we have Paul, a onetime well-to-do Pharisee. He traded his position, his worldly resources, and his respect as a noted Pharisee. What did he trade them for? He traded them all for beatings, death threats, whippings, stoning, shipwrecks, jail, and prison. Now it is easy for his contemporaries to say, "Hey man. That Gospel - that conversion - really hasn't paid good dividends. I'd be ashamed. You look like a fool." But he is *not ashamed*. He's not ashamed - not because of the prestige he received, or because he was a smooth communicator – he even said he wasn't. It was first because, in **Romans 1:14, he writes, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish."** Paul felt in debt to all people to share this good news. Why? Because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone! In today's language, we may say for the atheist, for the agnostic, for the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon, Jehovah's Witness, etc. It's for everyone. *That is amazing news.*

But we all need to be careful. We all need to be careful that we are not like Jonah. Remember what Jonah did with good news for Nineveh? He ran away from them, because he didn't want them to repent. We need to check our own hearts to make sure we feel a deep debt, so that we remain humble and do not hold disdain for our neighbor. That humility will attract others for the sake of Christ.

DISCUSSION:

N: Let me bring in my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. What does it mean from your perspective to be humble, and yet confident when sharing the Gospel?

C: Well, I've heard it described as this, Nat: I'm just a beggar trying to tell another beggar where to find food. Right? So I heard that from Greg Laurie and I love it. So I acknowledge that I'm a beggar who comes with nothing to offer Jesus, but my sin and need for salvation. And then I want to write in the sky that Jesus is exactly who He says He is.

A: To me, it's a fine line, and maybe it's more about not telling so much detail about how Jesus changed your life, and more just about the other person. I don't know. I wrestle with that.

N: Yeah, it's complicated. And I think we do need to have many testimonies prepared, as you said. You know, it is wise to actually think about how to share a testimony. And I often suggest people having a hundred word, almost elevator type talk, about their faith and their testimony, but then being prepared to share other testimonies. But what we need to be is good listeners - we need to be aware of the questions people are asking, and then answering those questions - so when we're prepared to give an answer, we can deliver to them what they need in that moment, rather than just what our canned response might be. But I think both of you really did nail it, in that humility is remembering that we are beggars. We are completely dead in our trespasses and sins, (Ephesians 2), but God being rich in mercy, He saved us by grace through faith. There it is: confident in the power of salvation through Jesus Christ; humble enough to admit it was not on our own doing, but rather what He has done for us. So talking about sharing the Gospel and loving people - how do you love people enough to share the Gospel, especially with those who aren't so lovable?

C: I don't dislike anyone enough to want them to be separated from God. I think about the person who rubs me the worst way right now, and it's a politician. I envision myself giving her the Gospel, because I want to know that she's had it. You know what I'm saying? Like, I want her to have a clear Gospel, so she could make that choice. I don't know what that choice will be. I want it that she follows Jesus. I want her saved. I would not find any happiness in her not being in Heaven with me, but I'm telling you, it's hard. Not in that - I just don't want to see anybody perish like that, you know?

N: Do you think part of it's actually seeing yourself rightly, prior to Christ? I mean, well, we tend to put people in these tiers, right, on like bookshelves of goodness. So you have politicians and lawyers, like maybe on the bottom level of "worst ever". And then, you've got, you know, these people as you move up - but that's not at all how God views us - in those rankings. The reality is, that politician, that murderer, that rapist - in God's eyes - it's sin and it separates us from Him. So when I can pause and say, "Yo, Nat, you may not have killed anybody, but you have in your mind, you know, and you've done things that are so offensive to God, and yet He saved you. Why shouldn't He save them?" I don't know. That's just something I processed. What do you think about that, Arnie?

A: Yeah, I think that's very helpful, to think on those lines. And I have to agree too with Cara that the people that aren't so lovely, sometimes are easier, and the people that you love a lot - or

maybe you look up to - that don't know Jesus, and you don't want to offend them. It's pretty interesting. I think.

So, if we know we are sinful and we are separated from God, and if we know the only way to find eternal peace and a restored relationship with God is through the Good News of the Gospel – then how can we be ashamed? If we live an authentic faith, it will look different than the world's economy. We will think, believe, and act differently than those who are not Christians. The Apostle Peter described us as aliens. So people will look at us and scratch their head. They may even look at us with contempt - Sounds much like what's happening in the U.S. today. It's okay. It's expected. **DO NOT BE ASHAMED.** This Good News - this Gospel - is the power of salvation to everyone!

A lot of times, what is best for us isn't what is easiest. My middle son Landon was born quite normal. But in just 2 short months of life, his life changed. He was diagnosed with cancer. He had to have a tumor removed from his skull. He began wearing glasses at 2 months old. Two months later, his tumor came back and they had to remove a portion of his skull and his eye socket. This tumor impaired vision in one of his eyes. Now he's 11, and was patched for nearly 8 years. When he began Kindergarten, he patched over his eye. But even as a kindergartener, he felt ashamed. He didn't want people to look at him as different.

Can you imagine a better illustration for us with the Gospel? That patch for Landon meant good news for his eye. It meant healing, restoration. It was uncomfortable for a while. But it did help his eye. It was good news. And yet at times he was ashamed. As a child, I can understand feeling ashamed because of the patch. I can understand the discomfort of that. But what's my excuse as an adult, who knows the cure for sin – the most infectious disease of all time? The medicine for our eternal sickness may sound offensive, but it is *The Way*.

This leads me to the last Biblical truth. The last biblical truth is: Jesus is the only way.

I know in today's P.C. world - that is intolerant to say. However, *any* truth claim is exclusive in its nature. The claims of Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and even Christianity – we all differ on who God is or isn't. Think about what Moses said. Moses said God is One. Krishna said there are many gods. Buddha was agnostic. Mohammad said that God was one as well. Christianity identifies God being three-in-one, and Christ is part of that Trinity, that Godhead. So as you can see, each worldview puts forth a truth claim, and they are not all equal. Simply put, they cannot all be right. All major world religions claim “a way” to God or to some kind of solution for life's problems. Only in Christianity, does someone, namely Jesus, claim to be “the way.”

John 14:6 (NASB) quotes Jesus, saying, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father but through me.” That is as plain as it can be. He doesn't say, *This is A way.* NO, he says, *I am THE way.*

Luke writes, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, ESV).**

All other religions and cults leave you guessing, “Am I in or am I out?” But then they should probably ask, “Am I in or out, of what?” No other major religion had the mission to redeem mankind, except for Christianity. The truth claims of Orthodox Christianity can be tested and they can be verified. So, we as believers who at one time were evangelized, have a choice: Will we share the Good News, or will it end with us? A friend of mine asked, “Do you want to be the last link on the chain of evangelism?” I hope your answer is “no”, because you know people are spiritually bankrupt. You know there are no do-overs. This life is the only shot you get. We know we should not be ashamed of the Gospel. It does the work for you.

A while ago, I was at Best Buy. It was time for a new phone. I sat down at the kiosk, and up came a young kid, probably 19 or 20. He asked me who I was, and what I did. I made small talk, and mentioned studying a degree out in Los Angeles. He was stoked, because he was getting ready to go to L.A. “What are you studying in L.A.?” he asked. “Christian Apologetics,” I said. “Christian, what?” he said. “Yeah, no one else knows either. It’s a study of the defense of the claims of Christianity.” He responded, “You don’t believe that stuff, do you?” “I do,” I responded. “But what are your thoughts on it?” “Oh, you know, I think that’s great for some people. But I’m too much of a free spirit. I kind of think all roads will get us to a final place, where we’ll all be happy.”

As I’ve processed that discussion, and others like it, here’s how man’s thinking goes: Think of a bookshelf. On the top shelf is the world-class good people. We’ll call this “The League of Awesome-sauce.” They are awesome. These are the Mother Therasas of the world. On the shelf below that is the “League of Good-sauce”. These are all-around good people: philanthropists, servant leaders. Below that is “The League of Okay-sauce”. These people do a pretty good job of right behavior. They generally give more than they take. They tell the truth for every lie they tell. Below them is “The Bad-sauce League”. They’re trouble. They’re the people who are known as the thieves, liars, adulterers of the world. And below them is “The League of Evil-sauce”. This level is reserved for the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Bin Laden, etc.

What’s interesting is, when you ask a person what level gets into Heaven, do you know which level they pick? Whatever level they are on! Wherever they land, and above, make the cut. They believe, “At least I’m not as bad as that person”. Now God, too, will draw a line. However, God does not draw a line horizontally. He will draw a line right down the middle vertically - horizontal levels don’t matter to God - there are those on one side who say “yes” to His Son - Those who receive His grace through faith freely.

Friend, God makes disciples who make disciples. He called us disciples, and now calls us to “go and make disciples of all nations.” We live in a neat place and time, because the nations are in our backyard. This Gospel is for everyone. And it is a Gospel of which we cannot and should not

be ashamed. Friend, there is no greater need than the need for Salvation. There is no greater privilege than to be the giver of that message of hope and reconciliation. The question is, will you go and deliver it?

N: All right. It is time for my favorite part of the show - to bring in my discussion partners, Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. Now Arnie, I'd like to start with you and talk about prayer. We didn't get to talk much about prayer in this message, but we both know that prayer is incredibly important to outreach. How have you incorporated prayer into your outreach strategies?

A: That's a great question. And I'd almost flip that back to you as the resident theologian, but you know, I think if I were you - if I were Pastor Nat - I'd say it's critical. Matter of fact, without it, can anything happen?

N: Yeah. And that is by far, one of our best tactics in outreach - is praying for the lost. We know clearly from Scripture that we can't save anybody, right? The power of salvation is the Gospel, and people are saved by grace. And it's the calling of the Holy Spirit who melts the heart. But we should be praying for the lost by name - praying for them daily, praying that God will soften their hearts to the Gospel. And yet, what's cool is, by a divine privilege, He's given us the opportunity to actually participate in the process of evangelizing - scattering the seed, and watering as we go. But yet, it all needs to be bathed in prayer, because again, God is the One who does the saving. And we all know in this room, the power of prayer in our own lives as believers, but also in the power of prayer for those who are far from God.

Cara, give us an example of some questions you can ask to get a conversation going about Christ.

C: I love tattoos, because those are always a good conversation starter: What does your tattoo mean? If they're wearing a shirt, and it has some saying on it or something, I'll talk to them about that. But like your beard, something that's unique about you, right. I just read this thing on gotquestions.org, about what the Bible says about shaving. Okay. So you would ask me, "Well, what does the Bible say about shaving?" [So what does the Bible say about shaving?] Or at least I hope, right? And it basically talks about hair and shaving, and it doesn't say a whole lot, but it also doesn't say a whole lot of the things that people claim that it says. There's a whole lot of things that I never even knew about Jesus, or... .. you know, so you're opening up a conversation and you're hoping that they ask questions back. [Right]. But I always try to find something unique about that person.

A: Well, and you know, Cara, I did your suggestion about the tattoo, and I asked somebody, "What was that tattoo?" And it was, I think, 1975. And they said, "Well, that's the year both my parents were born". And I thought, "Hmm, that would have really been a good conversation starter", because I know this particular person's parents are going through a divorce, and I thought, "Wow, Cara's really got something there." And that is a good way. I didn't pursue that -

I don't think it's appropriate for guys to counsel women. [I agree.] And so I just totally backed away, but I said a little prayer for the person, and I thought, “Wow, Cara, that is so...” - because that would have been a tremendous opener, if it was a dude, and they told me that - you know, I'd say, “Wow, you know, both of your parents - is something going on there? You know, I heard they're splitting up”, and you could really pursue it. I didn't, but I think what you've got - that's a great, great idea. And I mean, it just resonated with me, to burn in your arm both your parents' birthdays, when they're splitting up - that's pretty amazing.

C: Well, people are unique, and they do unique things that represent themselves, but they're unique to God. And I think when we can really open their eyes to how unique and awesome God views them, then they really can approach Him, with going into a relationship with Him. Man, this world beats you down. It just makes you feel like you don't matter. People want to know that they matter. [Yeah.] And we can give that to them, because we've represented Christ, and they matter to Him, right?

N: Yeah. There's a great commercial by Chick-fil-A that it says, *Everyone has a story*. And you know, each one of us in this room, each person listening, every person out there outside our doors - they have a story. They may have a tattoo - they may not; they may have a beard - they may not; they may have scars or they may not. But the reality is - we all have a story. The question is - will we, as Christians, take time to invest in their lives to hear that story - to not be quick to judge, to not condemn them, because they smoke, have a tattoo, 20,000 piercings, whatever it is. Are we going to pause and say, “Hey, tell me about yourself: Who are you? What have you experienced in your life that has brought you to this point? I'd love to hear your story.” And as we've all said, when we do that, when we really do become interested, and not interesting, guess what? People turn around and say, “Okay, your turn: what's your story?” And those are those huge God-sized openings, to share the Gospel with those who are far from Christ, and let them hear and see the difference that Christ has made in us. I just want to remind our listeners that as Christ followers, we take Jesus with us at all times. So Cara and Arnie, where are some of the places you'll be taking Jesus today?

C: Well, I was in Omaha this morning, getting my hair done, and I took him there. And as it turns out, I've been working on this girl to try to get her to Jesus. And I swear, she's forgot everything I've tried to say. However, I don't know who the person is, but someone said to her at some point, “God is going to give you what you can handle”. And she told me that today, and I thought it wasn't me that said that, but I was able to build on that. I don't know who this other person is that sits in that hair chair. But I built off of that, because it's her turn to struggle. I think all of us have taken our turns in the abyss of COVID-19 - where we have that day, where we just feel down or angry or frustrated with it. And today was her day. So whoever that person was, I was able to build on that nugget. And I'll just keep continuing to work on that, right? [Right].

A: For me, where I'm going to take Jesus, I take Him deep - it's interesting you ask that question. And we're doing research on evil, of all things. So I take Jesus wherever I go. And it was so eerie yesterday: There's actually journal articles on evil, and I'm printing this study up,

and my printer just keeps going and going, and printing the same page over and over. And it's like, "Doo-doo, doo-doo; doo-doo, doo-doo". And I told Char - she goes, "Don't say that - don't say that!". And I turned off my printer. But really, you take Jesus, you know, everywhere. And that's what makes it so reassuring. Even when you study the depths of evil - Jesus is right there looking over your shoulder.