

The Challenge of Evangelism

First preached by Harold McRay, Northwest Church of Christ, Lawton, OK
and modified over the years.

First, on behalf of the Northwest congregation in Lawton, OK, I would like to thank your elders and you for inviting us to be with you today. We love your concern for lost souls and your belief that Go ye means Go me.

We encourage you and challenge you to attend this afternoon's workshop. You could not spend a better three hours in the Lord's work. You will learn the "Gospel Chain" method of teaching the Gospel to lost souls. They may be the souls of your parents, your children, your relatives, your friends, co-workers or strangers. You will never again be afraid to ask anyone to study to learn what the Bible says we must do to be saved. You may already have a method that works and that you are comfortable with. That's great. Come this afternoon and perhaps you will learn something that may help you use your method even better.

(This paragraph only if appropriate)

Remember, you will be conducting a campaign (door knocking) here in _____. It is your campaign, not ours. We will bring a skeleton crew to help you, but it will be up to you to knock the doors and teach the studies and follow up to help the new Christians grow and remain faithful.

I'd like to continue what we started in this morning's class and challenge you to meet the Challenge of Evangelism. Many challenges face the church today. There is the challenge of restoring New Testament Christianity. There is the challenge of making our homes what they ought to be. There is the challenge of keeping our lives pure. There is the challenge of doing good to all men especially to those of the household of faith. But the number 1 challenge is the challenge of evangelism. None is more important. If we miss this challenge, we've missed everything.

There are 7 billion people in the world today. 1/3 have never heard of Jesus Christ. A recent survey showed more than 87% of the world's population knows what COCA-COLA is, yet only 67% know who Jesus Christ is. People don't even know who Christ is.

Let's look at America. About 40% of the American people have no religious affiliation at all. Of the 60% who do, 1/2 of them are not active participants in their religion. Would you believe that 90% of the American people know absolutely nothing of the restoration plea of the Churches of Christ? The greatest challenge facing the church today is the challenge of evangelism and we see it in the world because the world doesn't know a thing about Christ.

Mac Lyon, told us that the average congregation has about 160 members. They baptize 8 people a year. 6 of them are children of the members. And half of them fall away.

Flavil Yeakley, one of the statisticians in the church said that only 23% of our congregations today are growing significantly. He meant growth through conversion of the lost to Jesus Christ. Now some churches are growing through a transfer of membership from one congregation to another, but brethren, that's just SWELLING. It's one thing to swell and another thing to grow and to save lost souls and to have them added to the church of the Lord.

In the late 1940's and 50's the churches of Christ were the fastest growing religious group in America. We grew 171% according to brother Gerald Paden. That's when our buildings were built because we were expanding. We were evangelistic. Then in the 60's it dropped to 33% per year and then to 17% and then to 6% and now we are growing about 1/2 of 1% per year. Today the two fastest growing religious groups in America are the Mormons and the Muslims, people who do not even use the Bible as their basic text!

The fastest growing group in any religious category is the religious "nones." They know there is something they are missing and are searching for the truth. They are open to studying with us. The fields are white unto harvest. We just need to ask them to study and be ready to teach them when they say yes.

What can we do? I want to suggest 3 truths to which we must be totally committed. I mean totally committed! If we lack commitment in any one of these 3 areas, we will not be evangelistic.

NUMBER ONE: ALL ACCOUNTABLE MEN AND WOMEN ARE LOST IN SIN AND NEED GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

Do you believe that? That is the first truth to which you must be committed. All accountable men and women are lost in sin and need God's forgiveness.

The Bible says that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23.

In others words, all of us are sinners. Sin is simply transgression of the law. 1 John 3:4.

1 John 5:17 says "all unrighteousness is sin" and James 4:17 says "if a man knows to do good and doesn't do it, to him it is sin."

What is sin? It is violating the will of God. It's going contrary to God's will in our lives. 1 John 1:7-8 says "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Now I don't how the Bible can be any plainer than that. All men and women accountable to God are in sin and need to be saved from that sin. Now, my friends, if I believe that all men are lost in sin and need to be saved, then I'll be evangelistic. In 2 Thessalonians. Chap 1 we read when Jesus comes with his angels in flaming fire, he'll take vengeance on those on those who know not God and who obey not the Gospel of Christ and they shall suffer punishment and eternal punishment. If I am not committed to the truth that all accountable men and women are lost in sin and need God's forgiveness, then I'll never be evangelistic

NOW, THE SECOND TRUTH TO WHICH WE MUST BE COMMITTED IS THAT GOD DOES NOT ARBITRARILY FORGIVE SIN.

God doesn't just randomly say. Well, today I think I'll save these people. Tomorrow I think I'll save those people, and just on a whim He decides whom he'll save today and tomorrow. God isn't that way. God has a way for everyone to be saved. He has but one way. And that way is Jesus Christ. And the only way that men and women can be saved from their sins is in Jesus Christ. Now if I don't believe that, I will not be evangelistic. There is no other way. "I am the way, the truth and the life", Jesus said. "No man comes to the Father except by me."

There is no other way. Do you believe that? You can't go through Mohammed. You can't go through Buddha. You can't go through any man or any system other than God's system. It's Jesus or none. "There is none other name under heaven given among men wherein we must be saved." Acts 4:12.

My friends, it's the way of God or no way at all. Do I believe that? That's the only way. The Bible says that it is. Jesus died for you and for me. He tasted of death for every man. He died for my sins according to the Scriptures. 1 Cor. 15:3. He just had to do it because it was God's plan. He took the wrath that God had for me. He took the punishment that was due me. With His stripes I am healed. There is no other way. He is our salvation. God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He's not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance. 1 Tim 2:4 and 2 Pet 3:9. God doesn't want anybody to be lost. He 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. That is God's way.

That is the second truth to which I must be committed. I must believe that He is the Son of God. Jesus said, "Except you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus said, "Repent or perish." Jesus said, "If you will confess me before men, I will confess you before the Father. But if you deny me, I will deny you before the Father." Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." That's God's way. That's the only way. But thank God there is a way, and we know that way and can teach that way.

NOW, HERE'S THE THIRD TRUTH TO WHICH WE MUST BE COMMITTED:

Not only to the truth that all men are accountable and lost in sin. Not only that God has only one way of salvation and that's in Christ.

We must be committed to the truth that GOD HAS ONLY ONE INSTITUTION, ONLY ONE PEOPLE, WHO HE DESIGNATED TO TAKE THIS MESSAGE OF SALVATION TO THOSE WHO ARE LOST IN SIN AND THAT'S THE CHURCH.

That's it. God has no other system. He has no other way. If the Lord's people don't take the Gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world, those people will not hear the message. They will die in their sins. There is no other way. Now we can't do anything about the first truth that all men are lost in sin. We can't do anything about the second truth that except in Christ no man can be saved. But, we absolutely can do something about this one. It's the only one we can control and we must control. We as members of the Lord's church can and must take the saving Gospel message of Christ to those who are lost in sin. We are commanded to do it and God has given us no other system to do it. There is just simply no other way. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." What's the pillar that upholds that truth? Paul said it's the church. And in 1 Peter 1:22 Peter says, "You have purified your soul in your obedience to the truth." So it's the truth that saves. And the church has the truth and we must take it to those who are lost.

When you read the Book of Acts after Christ ascended to heaven, on every occasion where someone is saved from his sins, a member of the church was involved. Every time. There is not one case where anybody who was in sin and who was saved by Christ was saved without a member of the church being involved in the message. Not one. On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the twelve apostles taught the Gospel so that 3000 were baptized. Phillip went down and taught the Ethiopian eunuch. Ananias taught Paul. Phillip taught the Samaritans. Peter taught Cornelius. Paul taught the Philippian jailer. Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos. Is it any wonder then in John 6:45 Jesus said, "They will be taught of God. And they that have heard and learned come unto me."? The only way the lost will come to Christ is when they are taught, and when they hear, and when they learn. And you and I must do the teaching. That's why you need to be at the workshop this afternoon. You need to hear a system by which you can teach others. And it is so simple anybody can use it and teach others the word of God.

My friends let me tell you something I believe very strongly: Every program of the Lord's church should be calculated to involve winning souls. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came into the world to save sinners, Paul said. Jesus came for one reason and that was to save lost people. He didn't come to set up social programs. He didn't come to give everybody a better meal or a better house to live in although that is something we would like to see. He came to take lost people and bring them back and reconcile them back to God. And that's what you and I must be about. We have programs and we have meetings and we have activities and we have committees, but are they designed to win souls?

I heard a woman say, "I'm so busy doing church work, I don't have time to win souls." What is church work if it isn't winning souls? Are your top 10 church activities inwardly focused taking care of yourselves or are they outwardly focused winning souls?

Flight 401 was bound from New York to Miami, Florida. As they came in to land, one of the pilots saw that the little light that shows that the landing gear was down did not come on. So the flight engineer fiddled around with the light to see if it was burned out but nothing happened. The pilot reached up and did something and the other pilot reached up and did something and they didn't realize that as they circled round and round they were getting lower and lower. Until finally, that plane crashed into the Everglades and destroyed the plane and killed many of the passengers. Here were 3 experienced, trained, highly paid, professional pilots trying to figure out why a 75 cent light bulb didn't light until that plane crashed into the Everglades. Those men forgot the most basic rule of the air and that is - Don't forget to fly the plane.

We have forgotten the most basic rule of the church of the Lord and that is don't forget to save souls. Don't forget to lead the lost to Christ. If we are not doing that, we are not doing the work of the Lord. And for failing to do His work of teaching the lost, these people will lose their souls. And we will lose ours for not following God's command to teach them.

The ship's captain turned to the navigator and asked for their position and course. The navigator replied that he didn't know, but they sure were making good time.

An inventor invented a machine that had lights, bells, whistles, pulleys, gears and you would press a button and it would start running round and round and round. Somebody asked, "What does that thing do?" He said, "I don't know, but doesn't it run beautifully?"

My friends, a lot of our congregations are running beautifully. A lot of our congregations are making good time, but if we are not on the right course, if we are not teaching the lost, we have not met the challenge of evangelism.

The Lord commands every single one of us to teach his word. You may not be able to preach. You may not be able to teach a Bible class. You may not be able to knock a door, but let me tell you what, there is something you can do. You can learn this Gospel Chain method, and you can teach others about their souls.

We must meet the challenge of evangelism. We must be committed to these three truths:

1. All accountable men and women are lost in sin and are in need of God's forgiveness.
2. God has only one way of salvation and it is in Christ.
3. God's only institution to teach men and women how to be saved is his church.

Is there anything else that is better worth,
As along life's way we plod,
Than to find some wandering soul on earth,
And bring him home to God?
I would rather find a soul that's lost,
And bring him home again,
Than to own all earth's acres cost
Or all the wealth of men.

How glad I'd be when day is done,
In taking my last breath,
To know a word of mine had won,
And saved a soul from death.
-author unknown

There's nothing greater than teaching souls; the souls of others and your own soul. We must be evangelistic. And I hope and pray that today you will make that step to learn better how you can teach others.

Now there may be some here today who have learned the Gospel and would like to obey it. Or there may be someone here who would like to be restored to the church or who would like the prayers of the church. If you would like any of these things, please come as we stand and sing.