

Lesson 13: Purposes of the Church – Evangelism

Opening:

John Piper once noted: “Simply finding people interesting and caring about them is a beautiful pathway into their heart. Evangelism gets a bad reputation when we are not really interested in people and don’t seem to care about them.”

Let’s begin with a question: “Do you find people interesting?” Do you get to know them, while remembering that God has made them in His image, desires to redeem them, and will empower them with gifts through His Spirit? Do you truly care about people? God does, and He desires for all people to grow into Christ-likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). If the world around us does not think that we care about them, then why would they think that God cares about them?

Compassion is an interesting word. The first part of the word *com* means “with” and *pati* means “to bear, suffer, or to be filled with patience.” Compassion requires personal involvement. It is patience up close, a bearing with others.

Look at the following ways that Jesus showed and expressed compassion and write down what God teaches you from these texts, paying special attention to what Jesus noticed about other people:

Matthew 15:32-39 (for example: Jesus notices they are “hungry”, what else does He notice in this text?)

Luke 10:25-37 _____

Compassion opens and extends the door for evangelism. Showing care for others is important even if the encounter with another person is short. God wants people to be saved, and the way to reach people is to let them know that you care about them. Who is God asking you to invest in today? Who is God asking you to share your faith with? Do they know that you care about them?

Central Truths:

- The Christian is motivated for evangelism by the example and love of Christ.
- The Christian must be equipped for evangelism.
- The Christian must be available to share the gospel.

Purposes of the Church – Evangelism:

Evangelism is one of the central purposes of the church. Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus with others. A living and healthy church is a loving community of believers committed to sharing the gospel as an ongoing way of life. A church that is engaged in evangelism has a deep appreciation for the work of Christ and a passion to share it with others.

The church should equip Christ-followers with a true understanding of the gospel message. The good news of Jesus calls us to repentance. We can have a gospel that is too small (a “fire insurance” gospel which asks of the recipient no commitment to become a disciple of Jesus) or a gospel that is overstuffed (it has things added to it: rules, laws, and codes). The gospel is the clear message that God is our holy and perfect Creator, we have sinned and cut ourselves off from the God who made us, but we have hope. Jesus (who was all God and all man) came and died for our sins – rising from the grave so that we might have eternal life. God calls for a response to His offer of salvation in Jesus. He invites everyone, everywhere to repent of their sins, trust Christ to be saved, become a disciple who follows after and learns from Jesus, and share the gospel with others.

Examining the Text:

Reading the Biblical Text: Matthew 9:35-38

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

The Christian is motivated for evangelism by the example and love of Christ.

Look at VV. 35-36

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In Verse 35, Matthew repeats the mission of Jesus that he stated earlier (Matthew 4:23). The biblical principle is that Jesus shared with “all” the people He encountered. He wanted all people to know the “gospel of the kingdom.” This phrase is used by Jesus multiple times in Matthew (4:23; 9:35; 24:14). The phrase means the new kingdom that has come from God in Christ - the message and means of salvation that comes to us in Christ alone.

Verse 36 introduces to us how Jesus sees the world. He had “compassion.” Jesus saw the world in need of help. He came to bear our sins and to walk in patience with us. The principle is this: Jesus’ mission of evangelism (proclaiming the kingdom) was not motivated by disgust for sin but by compassion for the lost. While it is true that God hates sin, He loves us more – enough to die on the cross for us. When we look at the Bible, Jesus’ anger seems to be against those who should know better (Jesus expressed abhorrence for unfruitfulness and self-righteous judgmentalism – See Mark 11:12-19).

Jesus’ motivation for sharing the gospel was love. What keeps us from being motivated to share the gospel and show real compassion for people?

Three things might keep us from sharing our faith with others: 1) a lack of compassion; 2) fear of not knowing what to say or making the situation awkward; 3) isolation – separating ourselves from the world. The love of Christ should outweigh these things for a Christ-follower.

The Christian must be equipped for evangelism.

Look at VV. 35-36 again, and then at VV. 37-38

Notice how Jesus equipped the disciples: He called the disciples to follow Him; He modeled evangelism; He challenged them to have a different world view (V. 37 *Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”*); He called them to pray for the lost (Look at V. 38 *therefore pray earnestly to the Lord*

of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”); Jesus stressed the importance of evangelism.

Jesus modeled evangelism by: 1) going where people lived; 2) showing up in their everyday lives; 3) loving the people he encountered; 4) listening to people and inviting their questions - taking time to know why they hurt spiritually and physically; 5) talking to people about life and theology. Jesus engaged people with the gospel and called them to live it out in whatever context they were in.

The Christian must be available to share the gospel.

Look again at VV. 37-38 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Notice that Jesus first stresses that many need the gospel, but “the laborers are few.” One of the struggles with Christians is that they can become so busy doing good things (even serving in the church) that they fail to take time to invest in the lives of people who need to know Christ.

How can good things be a distraction from the most important thing?

V. 38 points out for us that God will send the right people into the lives of those who need to know the gospel. He makes and keeps divine appointments. Will we be willing to engage in those appointments? Availability occurs when we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading and when we are welcoming to those outside the church. God does not desire for all people to be like us, but He does want all people to know and follow after Him.

Applying the Text:

- What keeps you from sharing Christ with others? (Motivation, Fear, Availability, Other)?
- What are some ways that you as an individual could be more welcoming to those outside the church?
- How should Jesus’ compassion for the lost impact the way we see and relate to others (even those who may seem unreachable to us)?
- Read Matthew 4:19. What does it mean to be a “fisher of men”?
- What in your life would identify you as a “fisher of men”? How can you grow in this area?