

Evangelism: A Commitment to Action

By Jim Davis

Being around new Christians is always a refreshing joy. Despite the fact that they may have recently come from a very tangled and complicated past it is a new epoch for them. They have experienced the removal of their guilt and all things are fresh and new. It is a clean start and their abandoned love for Jesus Christ cannot help but rub off on others. They love Jesus and they want to be around Him. They want to know more about the Bible and they add enthusiasm to any Bible class. They look at the church and other believers through the innocent eyes of a newborn. We are reminded of our first-love for the Lord and convicted to pursue a deeper intimacy in our personal walk with the Him.

The church needs to reproduce to survive. In John 4 we find our Lord instructing the disciples as they travel through Samaria. Here are some great principles for effective evangelism. In the first part of the Samaritan narrative John records *the evangelistic message*. Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah and offers the Samaritan woman eternal life (v. 1-26). In the latter portion of the narrative Jesus instructs His disciples in *an evangelistic method* (v. 27-42). Borrowing Jesus' figure of speech we can learn how to harvest a crop in evangelism. This is a series of articles on effective evangelism taken from Jesus' instruction to his disciples. In these verses there is **a commitment to action** as demonstrated by Jesus and the Samaritan woman (v. 27-30); There is **a commitment to duty** (v. 31-34); And there is **a commitment of time** (v. 35-42).

The Commitment to Action

(John 4:27-30)

When we harvest a crop in evangelism the first labor is to sow the seed. Jesus and the Samaritan woman are both used to sow the seed of the gospel. Action is taken and labor is involved. Jesus demonstrated to the disciples that we should lay aside prejudice in order to sow the seed of the gospel. The Samaritan woman demonstrated the need to lay aside any bitterness or anger. Her background indicates that she was a social outcast and was likely mistreated by the people of the city in which she dwelt. It did not stop her from going to the men of the city and calling them out to meet the Messiah.

Sowers discard bias

Those of us who sow must reject our bias, go to others and invite them to the Messiah. When the disciples return from grocery shopping (v. 8) they find Jesus speaking with a Samaritan woman (v. 27). The Bible states that they "marveled" that Jesus had been speaking with a woman. It means that they gazed in amazement at Jesus' behavior. The Jewish cultural standards of the day not only restricted public speaking with women but they also frowned upon any association with Samaritans. They were an unclean and apostate people. Jewish rules forbade touching and most certainly drinking after a Samaritan. Some argued that the women should not be taught the law. Yet Jesus was talking theology with a Samaritan woman. If we had lived in that day we would have also marveled. The disciples' prejudice is identified as a gender bias and no mention is made of her being Samaritan in this verse.

You would almost expect Peter or one of the disciples to jump in and ask the questions that weren't asked, "What do You seek?" or "Why do You speak with her?" but they do not. Nevertheless, John makes it clear that Jesus' action was shocking to the disciples. We need to put aside our false piety and our erroneous ideas about what God is doing and who He will use.

Perhaps John intended for us to contrast the Samaritan woman with Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews (John 3). There is no doubt that the disciples' strategy would have been to invest time in Nicodemus and not the Samaritan woman. Most of us would share the disciples' perspective. We have already considered the gender bias. There was also a historic racial prejudice against the Samaritans. They were a mixed-breed of people while Nicodemus had a lineage with the tribe of Judah. There is no question that they would have had a preference for the pharisaic religion. It was certainly superior to the worship of the Samaritans. They maintained some adherence to the first five books of Moses but rejected the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Nicodemus would have also held a higher moral standing. The disciples certainly would have chosen him to represent their cause over an adulterous woman (v. 18). Nicodemus was a respected teacher in Israel. He would have had tremendous influence had he spoken up for Jesus as the Messiah. What we find is that Nicodemus brings no one to the Messiah but the Samaritan woman brings a city out to meet Jesus (v. 30). God's perspective on people is different from our perspective on people. His strategy in evangelism requires that sowers drop their bias to do His work.

Sowers go

Those who sow must not only lay aside the cultural bias and personal feelings but they also must be willing to go. This is what Nicodemus apparently was not willing to do. He came to Jesus by night and there is no indication that he ever brought anyone to meet the Christ. The disciples as well were not interested in hanging around Samaritans. They had to pass through Samaria but they did not want to spend any time there.

Jesus on the other hand saw opportunity to evangelize even while he was passing through a place. There are two kinds of sowing taking place. Jesus sows as he is passing through on his way to Galilee. The woman sows in the place where the Lord has planted her. Effective evangelism requires that we learn to do both. There was an opportunity that Jesus saw while the disciples completely overlooked it. Jesus said, "I do always the things that please the Father" (John 8:29). He was interested in harvesting a crop in evangelism and He recognized the social misfit as something more than a nuisance.

Notice that the Samaritan woman wastes no time after Jesus' confession that He is the Messiah. She goes to sow in the place where the disciples have just returned. They had no inclination to sow the gospel as they go especially in a place like Samaria. The Bible says she left her water pot and went into the city (v. 28). No doubt the water pot was a valuable necessity but it was a time to lay possessions aside and take action. Nicodemus, a teacher and ruler among the Jews, took no action (at least that we are aware of) when Jesus announced that "He descended from heaven" (John 3:13). He was the long awaited Messiah. The woman reacted in the proper way.

Conclusion

The message of the gospel demands action. It demands that we tell our neighbors and family members. It demands that we tell others when we are passing through their country.

We go to evangelize where God has placed us. We go to evangelize in the places where God providentially leads us. Catch the woman's urgency and leave behind the disciple's complacency. Catch Jesus' alertness and thrift to improvise and leave behind the disciple's sloth and lack of vigilance for opportunity to sow the seed.

Do we have compassion for unlovely people? Are we willing to reject our prejudice and reach out to others with the compassion of Christ? Are we willing to learn to recognize everyday events as opportunities that the Lord directs our way? Do we exhibit the excitement, and passion and urgency for the gospel that we should? There is a commitment to action when we sow the seed of the gospel.

Next month's article will be about the commitment to duty in evangelism.