

The Church - An Evangelistic Community

In recent weeks, we have traced the portrait of churches that Christ is building. We first considered the church as a covenant community. It is not a loose association of individuals, but a people bound to Christ and to *one another* by sacred promise and sacrificial love. We then focused on the church as a fellowshiping community, a body joined together in genuine love and mutual support, called to bear one another's burdens. We rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Last week, we turned to the church as a disciplined community, shaped by the Word of God and committed to training one another in truth and obedience.

But these truths point us *beyond* ourselves. A church bound in covenant, knit together in fellowship, and strengthened in discipleship is not meant to remain inward-focused. The very life of Christ in us presses us outward. As the Father sent the Son, so the Son has sent His churches. The covenant commits us, fellowship sustains us, discipleship equips us, but evangelism *extends* us.

A church that overemphasizes fellowship will dwindle with attrition if it doesn't grow by evangelism. A church that maximizes discipleship might be strong against a wolf in a wool suit, but they say the best defense is a good offense. In the same way, a church guards itself best not by retreating into a defense from the world, but by a good offense advancing into it with the Gospel.

Today we come to the evangelism function of the church. Evangelism is not the hobby of the gifted few. It is the heartbeat of the whole body. When a church neglects evangelism, it loses not only its mission, but its reason for existence. When a church proclaims Christ faithfully, the world hears the good news of salvation, sinners find mercy, and heaven rejoices.

1. Care in the laying the foundation -

We have to be careful to lay the foundation of the church in the Gospel.

1Cor 3:6-11 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

...

9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, *ye are* God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote this to the Corinthians, he had many aspects of spiritual growth in mind, but he warned them that evangelism was at the foundation of their church. Paul and Apollos had carefully laid the foundation on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What I would like to emphasize is *the caution* Paul warned them about. Without that caution to keep evangelism at forefront, churches and church movements have been distracted in their mission. This is evident in the way churches have responded to their loss or weakening of their Gospel focus.

In the last 30 or 40 years, several strands of American Christianity began to reframe evangelism under the banner of becoming "missional." This did not arise in the same way everywhere. Its roots and motivations differed according to the condition of the particular church movements.

Among the mainline denominations, which had long drifted into theological liberalism, evangelism had been largely abandoned decades earlier. Their gospel had been reduced to a social message of justice, inclusivity, and benevolence. As membership steadily declined, these

churches sought to rebrand their presence in the community as "missional," a way of affirming their social involvement while compensating for the absence of direct gospel proclamation. Missionaries were to focused on helping dig wells and teach farming, but the Gospel became minimized.

Within the growing ranks of *non-denominational* churches, evangelism was often downplayed in favor of a tolerance-driven practice. To avoid offense and to broaden their appeal, these churches frequently muted doctrinal clarity and stressed relevance, community, and positivity. For them, becoming "missional" seemed a happy alternative providing an outward-facing identity without returning to the discomfort of strong doctrinal evangelism.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Baptist group in the USA, the story was more one of complacency than outright loss of evangelism. Baptists had traditionally been known for vigorous evangelism, but many congregations had grown comfortable, program-driven, and content with their size. Evangelism was still affirmed in theory, but in practice being missional sometimes functioned as a softer substitute for the urgency of direct witness.

Except for the liberal churches, missional evangelicalism *did* have a positive impact on what it meant to be a *sent community*. Evangelism became not merely what Christians said but how they lived. In short, the gospel was to be made credible through the ordinary practices of honesty, faithfulness, and care.

While this reorientation had strengths, it also carried *inherent risks*. It rebuked the hypocrisy of churches that lived for God on Sunday but the world on Monday. Yet in practice – and here is the problem – many congregations slipped into an unhealthy imbalance. Because evangelism can be awkward or intimidating for many believers, the missional emphasis on "just live out your faith" became a *convenient substitute* for ever actually *articulating* the gospel. *Lifestyle evangelism* was not just a *tool*

for winning the lost, it *became* the program. Social credibility replaced verbal proclamation. Christians could content themselves with being "good neighbors" while never mentioning the name of Christ.

The New Testament actually insists upon both dimensions of practice and preaching. For sure we are called to:

Matt 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

The gospel must be embodied. But, we must also *proclaim* the Gospel.

2Tim 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season **[w h e t h e r i s s e e m s i n a p p r o p r i a t e o r n o t , o r w h e t h e r w e f e e l l i k e i t o r n o t]** ; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

When "being missional" was reduced to lifestyle alone, evangelism was effectively muted. At its best, the missional combined credibility of life with clarity of speech. At its worst, it too easily replaced evangelism with mere good citizenship. Churches could become content with social involvement without gospel proclamation. A movement born as a recovery of evangelism too often produced the same evangelistic silence it had sought to remedy.

2. The Mission of Jesus -

Even if you pass laws or make executive orders to create a social gospel, even if you put the most positive spin on it, it is still the wrong gospel. You might get to where you influence some good behavior, but you are not going to solve the sin problem. Sinners will be sinners taking advantage and sinning against each other. Only the Gospel of Christ can change a heart. There are those who mischaracterize churches over the last 2000 years and fault them for every evil. They

do not recognize that this was due to those who violate *true* Christianity. The Gospel message has not only elevated the believer to be a child of God, but it is the message that elevates the world out of degradation. At the end of the sermon notes I have included a list of the impact that true Christianity has had on the world.

Jesus stated the mission of the church with elegance. He got in the most meaning in the fewest of words. The Gospel message *is* the mission of Jesus Christ.

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Let all the social gospel go, be as authentic as you can be, live in the bonds of fellowship, study the Word of God, but if you miss that this all leads to the winning of souls to Jesus then you have missed the message of the Bible. The Gospel message appears at the heart of every New Testament book.

- Matthew records Christ's challenge to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...". Matthew 28:19-20
- Mark records Christ's challenge "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15
- Luke records Christ's challenge "...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations." Luke 24:47
- John declared, "But these are written, that ye might believe..." John 20:31
- In Acts, Christ sets the mission in motion, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me... unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8
- Paul told the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation..." Romans 1:16
- Paul told the Corinthians, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" 1 Corinthians 9:16
- Paul also reminded the Corinthians,

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ...be ye reconciled to God" 2 Corinthians 5:20

- Paul warned the Galatians "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" Galatians 1:8-9
- Paul proclaimed the charge to preach the Gospel to the Ephesians, "...that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Ephesians 3:8-9
- Paul told the Philippians how everything in his life served to spread the Gospel, "...the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." Philippians 1:12
- Paul commended the Colossians for their outreach that extended to the world, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world..." Colossians 1:5-6
- Paul commended the Thessalonians as a model for other churches, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord..." 1 Thessalonians 1:8
- Paul asked the Thessalonians, "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course..." 2 Thessalonians 3:1
- Paul told Timothy, God "will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:4
- Paul told Timothy to preach "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves... that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil." 2 Timothy 2:25-26
- Paul told Titus, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Titus 2:11
- Paul prayed for Philemon, "...that the communication of thy faith may become effectual..." Philemon 6
- Paul warned the Hebrews, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation..." Hebrews 2:3
- James said, "...he which converteth

the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death..."

James 5:20

- Peter told us, "...be ready always to give an answer... of the hope that is in you." 1 Peter 3:15
- Peter also told us, God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9
- John told us "...That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us..." 1 John 1:3
- John also warned us, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God..." 2 John 9
- John also encouraged us to support evangelism, "We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth." 3 John 8
- Jude told us evangelism was a true rescue mission, "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire..." Jude 23
- The final statement of the Bible is the Gospel invitation, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come..." Revelation 22:17

3. The Benefit of the Gospel -

The first thing the Gospel does is save us.

1John 5:11-13 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

The Gospel doesn't only *save* lives, it *changes* lives.

- Peace with God - Romans 5:1 -

"Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

- Deliverance from the Wrath of God's final judgments - 1 Thessalonians 1:10 - "Jesus... delivered us from the wrath to come."
- Hope of Christ's Return - 2 Thessalonians 2:1 - "By our gathering together unto him." - Assurance of being taken up in the rapture.
- Freedom from Sin's Power - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:"
- Assurance of Eternal Life - 1 John 5:13 - "That ye may know that ye have eternal life."
- Indwelling of the Holy Spirit - Ephesians 1:13-14 - "Sealed with that holy Spirit of promise."
- Adoption into God's Family - Galatians 4:5 - "That we might receive the adoption of sons." -
- Victory over Death - 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 - "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

4. Our Challenge -

One thing that I have appreciated in Independent Fundamental Baptist churches is that we did not experience a decline in evangelistic urgency. That would have required us to reinvent our identity. We have consistently stressed personal soul-winning, door-to-door evangelism, public preaching, and confrontational proclamation of the gospel. Evangelism is not a program to rediscover, but a central mark of obedience. This insistence often sets us apart from broader evangelicalism, especially as other groups shifted toward attractional models or cultural accommodation. Because of this, Fundamentalist churches did not need to replace evangelism with "missional" language. Our identity as evangelistic churches was already well-defined and unapologetic. We have held firm to the conviction that gospel proclamation is non-negotiable. So our challenge as a

church is to be faithful to preach the Gospel.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise.

1Cor 9:16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

In the Times-Reporter news, in September, 1985 a celebration of a New Orleans municipal pool was reported. The party around the pool was held to celebrate the first summer in memory without a drowning at the New Orleans city pool. In honor of the occasion, 200 people gathered, including 100 certified lifeguards. As the party was breaking up and the four lifeguards on duty began to clear the pool, they found a fully dressed body in the deep end. They tried to revive Jerome Moody, 31, but it was too late. He had drowned surrounded by lifeguards celebrating their successful season.

-New Philadelphia, OH, Times-Reporter, September 1985

What a tragedy that the very ones trained to save lives were so caught up in their own fellowship that they failed to see the one who was perishing at their feet! We are the lifeguards in a world drowning in sin. God has not placed us here to admire our training, to boast in our safety, or to enjoy our fellowship alone. All of those things matter, but they matter most when they prepare us to do the one thing we cannot neglect: to seek and to save the lost.

We dare not celebrate our programs, our fellowship, or even our soundness in doctrine if, while we rejoice among ourselves, souls around us slip into eternity without Christ.

1Thess 2:19 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ **[There is a soul winner's crown to be won.]**

If you are here today without Christ, the very heart of the message you've heard is that Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. The Bible says plainly, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). Salvation is not found in church membership, good works, or religious tradition – it is found only in Christ. He died for your sins, He rose again to give you life, and He offers that life freely to you today. Will you repent of your sin and trust Him as your Savior? The door of mercy stands open. Don't leave without the assurance that you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the primary message of the Bible, don't miss it!

And Christian, what about you? We have seen that the church is called to be an evangelistic community. Evangelism is not the task of a few, but the calling of us all. He that winneth souls is wise. Woe is unto us, if we preach not the Gospel! If you've grown silent, if fear has kept you from speaking, or if comfort has dulled your zeal, will you come and ask the Lord to rekindle your heart for souls? Maybe there's someone specific God has placed on your mind, someone who needs to hear the gospel from your lips. Will you commit yourself afresh to be a witness, to shine your light, and to speak the good news of Christ? Have you learned a plan of salvation to present to someone? Are you part of the evangelistic outreach of the church? Are you just waiting till someone comes up and asks you "What must I do to be saved?"

Addendum to the sermon:

1. Sanctity of Life and Human Dignity: Christianity elevated the value of every human being as made in the image of God, helping to undermine practices like

infanticide, gladiatorial games, and human sacrifice in the Roman Empire. Scripture: Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:4-5

2. Charity and Care for the Poor: Christians became known for their care of widows, orphans, and the destitute. This legacy led to the establishment of almsgiving traditions, food distribution, and organized charity, shaping the very concept of social welfare. James 1:27; Acts 4:34-35

3. Education and Literacy: Monasteries and cathedral schools preserved classical learning, copied manuscripts, and eventually laid the groundwork for modern universities. The desire to read Scripture also drove literacy in common languages. Deuteronomy 6:6-7; 2 Timothy 3:15

4. Healthcare and Hospitals: Christians pioneered hospitals in the fourth century, providing medical care to the sick and poor. Compassionate nursing and the institutionalization of healthcare flowed out of the Christian ethic of mercy. Matthew 25:36; Luke 10:34

5. Abolition of Slavery: While slavery was a global institution, Christianity planted the seeds for its rejection. Abolitionists like William Wilberforce drew directly from Biblical principles to fight against the slave trade. Galatians 3:28; Philemon 16

6. Rule of Law and Justice: Christian teaching about justice, equality before God, and moral accountability influenced the development of legal systems. Concepts such as human rights and fair treatment trace their roots to Biblical ethics. Micah 6:8; Romans 13:1

7. Art, Music, and Literature: Christianity inspired masterpieces in architecture (cathedrals), music (hymns, oratorios), and literature (from Dante to Milton). These works were often created to glorify God and uplift human souls. Exodus 31:3-4; Psalm 150:4

8. Elevation of Women: Christianity affirmed the spiritual equality of women with men. Over time, this emphasis contributed to better treatment of women, including protection from abuse and recognition of their role in ministry and society. Galatians 3:28; Romans

16:1-2

9. Scientific Foundations: Many early scientists were devout Christians who believed creation reflected divine order. Figures like Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, and Blaise Pascal pursued science in harmony with faith. Psalm 19:1; Jeremiah 33:25

10. Missionary Work and Global Compassion: Missionaries not only preached the Gospel but also built schools, translated languages into writing, founded hospitals, and defended indigenous peoples against exploitation. Christianity often brought literacy, medicine, and advocacy alongside spiritual renewal. Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8

1. Care in the laying the foundation - 1Cor 3:6-11, Matt 5:16, 2Tim 4:2
2. The Mission of Jesus - Luke 19:10
3. The Benefit of the Gospel - 1John 5:11-13
4. Our Challenge - Prov 11:30, 1Cor 9:16, 1Thess 2:19