

The Mandate of Evangelism

Perhaps you have heard someone say something like, "I wish you Christians would stop trying to convert everyone. Why can't you just live and let live? Why can't you just let everyone choose his own way?"

Maybe you've heard it this way: "It is really arrogant for you to say that Jesus is the only way and that all other ways are wrong. It is really narrow-minded of you to say that my view is wrong and that I must believe what you believe to go to heaven." If you've ever heard something like that, it's because you have tried to share the message of Christianity with people in a world where people don't believe in absolute truth. But maybe when you have had a conflict like that, you have asked yourself, "Why do we have to share our faith, when people are so hostile to it? Why must we go around trying to make Christians out of people, when people don't want to be made into Christians?"

See, not every religion tries to aggressively get others to join. Judaism doesn't. Buddhism doesn't. Hinduism doesn't. New Age religions don't. In fact, not every religion claims that it is the only way and that you must know it and believe it, to be right with God.

Why is our religion evangelistic? Why is the faith of the Bible a faith which is supposed to be shared and declared? To put it another way, what are the reasons for evangelism? Why is it in our faith? What is the mandate for evangelism based on?

I want to start this series in evangelism by giving you the three main reasons why we evangelise - three reasons that explain why we bother with this, when we would probably be a lot more popular if we didn't do it.

I. God Loves to be Known

I want to take you to a number of Scriptures. I want you to see them for yourself, so that you can tell that I am not just lifting a verse out of context to make a case. I want you to see this like a charge sheet being read out, one item at a time. God loves to be known, and He keeps saying that.

Exodus 14:4 Then I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that he will pursue them; and I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD." And they did so.

1 Samuel 17:46 "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

2 Kings 19:19 "Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone."

Psalms 22:27-28 All the ends of the world Shall remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations Shall worship before You. ²⁸ For the kingdom is the LORD's, And He rules over the nations. Psalm 72:19 And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.

Psalms 86:8-9 Among the gods there is none like You, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Your works. ⁹ All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And shall glorify Your name. Psalm 106:7-8 Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies, But rebelled by the sea -- the Red Sea. ⁸ Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, That He might make His mighty power known.

Isaiah 45:5-6 I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, ⁶ That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Habakkuk 2:14 For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea.

In the book of Ezekiel alone, the phrase 'then you shall know that I am the LORD' occurs sixty-one times. Now when you read these things, what you ought to be gripped by is that God loves to be known. This is His book, and He fills it with statements like, let the whole world know me, let everything in the world praise me; let Me be famous; let me be known and adored. Let me be the most well-known person of all. Everybody must know Me! No one should be ignorant of Me!

Now stop for a moment and ask yourself what you would think of another human being who acted like this? If you knew someone who was saying things like, "Let everyone know my name. Let every person know who I am. Spread my identity to every living person in the world."

What would you think of such a person? What would you say to such a person?

You would think this person is incredibly vain. This person is enormously conceited. You might say to them, "I think you think a lot too much of yourself. Not everyone in the world needs to know you."

Question: why is it vanity and arrogance and sinful selfishness when a human does it, but acceptable if God does it?

Well, if God were just like us, it would indeed be vanity and conceitedness and arrogance for Him to want to be known so widely. If He were no more impressive or valuable or important than the next person, He would have an over-inflated ego, and would not be worthy of worship.

But what if God were the most important reality in the universe? What if God was the ultimate gladness of every human being? What if God was the main reason for living? What if every human was incomplete without knowing God? Then the most loving thing God could do, would be to make Himself known. If God made you to find your ultimate satisfaction in Him, the most hurtful thing He could do to you would be to hide Himself from you. On the other hand, if He is the greatest blessing in the universe, the most loving thing He can do is to make Himself known.

You see, there are only two ways to explain the radically self-loving statements of God, either He is just like us, in which case His self-focus is arrogant and contemptible and needy, or else He is infinitely beautiful and worthy and lovely, in which case His self-loving statements are actually statements of **generosity**. When a fountain calls on everyone to drink, it is not because the fountain is thirsty; it is because the fountain is satisfying and overflowing and the more people drink, the more valuable that fountain is seen to be.

Every experience in life which fills and completes us, typically causes us to call others to likewise enjoy it. The more people we get agreeing with us that this food is tasty, or that the painting is beautiful or that the sunset is spectacular, or that the music is breathtaking, the more valuable it is to us.

We serve a beautiful, terrifying and awesome God. To know Him is to be centred, grounded, deepened, humbled, awakened, enlightened, and satisfied. And every human that comes to Him and emerges like that testifies: God is the worthiest Being of all.

That's the heart of evangelism. God loves to be known because He is the best One of all to know.

Sometimes I hear Jewish people objecting to Christian evangelism, by saying things like, "You Christians are always trying to force your faith on us! Judaism doesn't try to convert anyone. Our faith is secure enough that we don't need to gather converts!" But that just shows that modern Judaism has departed very far from the Old Testament. The Old Testament reveals a God who desires greatly to be published, to be declared, to be known, for His fame to spread. Christianity did not invent evangelism. This is the nature of the God of the Bible. He wants to be known!

The deepest and strongest and toughest root of evangelism is God's desires. You see, there are many reasons to evangelise people from a human point of view. We can think of how lost people are without Christ; we can think of the terrible suffering of hell; we can think of the difference Christ makes - and those are all true. But stronger and deeper than any horizontal reason for evangelism is the vertical reason: because God wants this. This is what keeps us evangelising, even when the people we are evangelising have no interest. "I don't tell you this because you deserve to hear it, I tell you this because the God I know deserves to be known."

When all your compassion for other humans dries up; when all your sense of mission and obligation to make disciples dries up, what must still be there is God's desire for God. And if you know from personal experience why God wants to be known, then you will overflow to others. And that overflow is called love.

If God was a private sort of God, then His worshippers would be very private about their faith and worship. If God did not really want to be known, then those who had accidentally stumbled across God would do their best to keep Him a secret, like a celebrity phone number which you agree not to share with the public. But if God Himself is overflowing with desire for people to know Him, then that must characterise our worship. You could say that God is the most evangelistic Being in the universe. To come to know Him is to begin to share in His enthusiasm for His glory, and to desire it to flow out to others.

There is a second reason why we must evangelise the lost.

II. Jesus Commands Repentance and Demands Discipleship

Mark 1:14-15 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Jesus commands repentance and He demands discipleship. Those are really two sides of the same coin. To the unbeliever, He commands us to repent and believe the gospel. To the believer, He commands, 'Take my message to others and make disciples'.

Now the thing you will notice about these verses is that Jesus was not adding to your list of possible options for life. He was not increasing the variety of perfectly personal choices you can make. Jesus enters the word and demands of all men that they repent of living for their own glory, believe the gospel and enter into a relationship with God through Him. He demands that people stop going their own way and come to Him.

Too often, we think of the gospel as a choice which men can accept and reject. And of course, it is a choice. But it is not a choice in the sense of choosing between equally valid and lawful options. It is a choice in the sense that you can choose to pay your taxes, and be fine, or you can choose to not pay your taxes and go to jail. Yes, you have a choice, but there is really only one correct way to choose.

The gospel is firstly a command from God. The gospel is an offer. But don't think it is merely an offer. It is an announcement from heaven to all men. There is a period now of amnesty. There is a period of clemency that God is granting to all rebels against His glory. Stop it now. Come to Him. Receive grace. He will forgive.

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

We evangelise because all human beings in the world are included in Jesus Christ's demand that they repent. Every person you meet stands under obligation to repent. He is already behind on his obligation. It is not just choice, choice, choice. You are meeting people who are storing up a massive fine with every day they refuse to hand in their borrowed lives to God. We evangelise not because we are making up this message, or trying to gather recruits.

In some sense, we are like debt collectors who tell people – do you realise you are in debt, and you are already in trouble? We are like officers of the court delivering subpoenas.

Now that does not mean that we demand everyone repent on the spot. We are to be wise and gentle and patient. The point is you don't really have to initiate this thing. Jesus has already told everyone to repent. You are simply announcing it to those who are ignorant. You are simply reminding people. They must, it is not a choice. They have to. To reject Christ is to condemn themselves. You are

Did you ever think that that person you are nervous to evangelise is actually already disobeying the command to repent? You are simply there to remind Him of the grace period. You are there, not to tell him or her to repent on your own authority, but to repeat that message which God Himself has made.

Turning to believers, the flip side of the coin is that we evangelise because Jesus instructed us to. There is no getting around it. To be saved and to come under the Lordship of Jesus is to become a witness of Jesus. To become a disciple of Jesus is to become a disciple-maker of Jesus. When Jesus said, "Go and make disciples", He was not issuing an optional approach for a select few.

The command to make disciples is as binding as the command to not lie, to be forgiving, to love one another, to not commit adultery, to be generous. Therefore, we are under obligation. Evangelism is not a specialised ministry for the super-spiritual. It is the duty of every believer. His last command must be a priority concern.

Now, the command to make disciples does not mean make converts in your own strength. It means be involved in the process. Be deeply committed to wanting all whom you know to be disciples. Be submitted to Jesus as Lord, where you labour with Him to spread the knowledge of who He is to others.

We do evangelism first because God desires to be known.

We do evangelism secondly because it is a divine imperative.

The third reason for evangelism brings us to the fate of people.

III. Judgement is Coming

2 Peter 3:1-10 ¶ Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), ² that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior, ³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." ⁵ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ⁸ ¶ But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Peter tells us that in the last days a certain kind of person will be quite common. This kind of person will follow his own desires, not live under Christ's authority and will mock the idea of the Christ's second coming and the future judgement of all men. What will be their objection, "You don't really believe Jesus is coming again? Life goes on today as it has since the Egyptian Pharaohs. It's business as usual. No one is going to break through the skies. That's just a fairy-tale. So live and let live!"

But Peter says they deliberately forget a very clear piece of evidence: God once judged the whole world with water.

The flood of Noah is proof that God judges. It is proof that God once judged the whole world. He once judged all men except eight people aboard the Ark. If you look around our world, there is lots of physical proof for Noah's flood. Not only do most cultures have some legend of a worldwide flood and an ark, but the geological record speaks of massive amounts of water. The very shaping of certain mountain ranges and canyons could only have been done by massive amounts of water and seismic activity. Archaeologists sometimes uncover dinosaur graveyards, with hundreds of skeletons in one place. Now either they all decided to go and die in the same place when they got old, or they were all buried alive in a massive and sudden burst of mud and water. There is ample evidence for Noah's flood.

And what that should say to all of us is that God does intervene. God does judge. And according to Peter, He will judge again, not by water, but by fire.

So why the delay? Because with God, a thousand years is as a day. And God is longsuffering, He wants as many people to come to repentance as possible.

This is one of the reasons we evangelise. Judgement is coming. There is no doubt about that. It is simply a matter of time. All around us we see these World Cup countdown clocks. I wonder what the clock with Christ's return says? Picture it counting down, seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years. Who knows how many there are? But it is counting down.

So we go because we know that every minute and hour and day we have is part of the longsuffering of God towards this world. It is part of His mercy that loves mankind and wants to see them saved. We go because we know what is coming. We go because we have already been saved from the wrath to come. God leaves us here not to entertain ourselves until He comes, like children playing at a bus stop, waiting for the bus. No. We are like people who know for a fact that an earthquake is coming, so we go from person to person, telling them what they must do.

People who know what is going to happen are obligated to tell those who don't yet know.

Ezekiel 3:18-19 "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. ¹⁹ "Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul."

Picture for a moment a man who knew that a massive lightning storm was on the way, which was going to strike the main power supply of our city, and end up destroying millions upon millions of appliances and devices, start fires which would destroy homes and even take some lives. This man knew that, and went home and made sure all his devices were unplugged, disconnected everything and then took cover for the storm, but didn't warn anyone else.

After that storm, when thousands of things' damage has been done to things in your home, and you meet him, smiling from ear to ear, what would he say to you? "Why didn't you say anything? Why didn't you warn us?" And what would he think if your answer was, "I didn't want to come across as judgmental. I didn't want to tell you what to do. I wanted you to make your own choices." He would be upset, because he needed to know what you knew.

Now if he came with that message and you chose to laugh at him, scorn him or mock him, then when the storm comes, you will only regret that you didn't believe him when you had the chance. But you will not be angry at him for withholding vital information.

We warn people because we know that judgement is coming.

Evangelism is not a recruitment drive to fill seats in church.

Evangelism is not some kind of self-affirmation, to get others to agree with us, so we don't feel insecure.

Evangelism is not a way of shouting down other opinions, so ours looks like the right way.

Evangelism is the overflow of a God who loves to be known, and ought to be known.

Evangelism is obedience to a command to make disciples, and calling people to obey the command to repent.

Evangelism is an announcement of coming judgement by those who have already been saved.