

## The Mindset of Evangelism

Matthew 10:5-35

Any activity or work that we begin requires that one adopt a certain mindset before doing it. Before you get up into the roof to try and fix a leaking pipe, you need a mindset that is different to the one you have when you are lying down to read a book. When you get up in the middle of the night to investigate that strange sound you heard, your mindset is particular to what you are doing. Soldiers have a mindset before they go into battle. Lawyers have a particular mindset before they go to court. Our mindset is our attitude and expectations as we approach the activity.

Evangelism has a mindset, too. There are a set of attitudes and expectations we should have as we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We see a lot of that mindset in Matthew 10:5-35.

This passage is an account of Jesus giving His apostles a debriefing. He gives them their instructions. Most of the things He instructs them in are very specific to the kingdom program that Jesus had at that time. A number of these things are not things which we duplicate today. He also takes the time to forewarn His disciples about the reception they will receive. He is forearming them and forewarning them of what they can expect as they go on their mission. But as often happens in Jesus' discussions about the future, at some point the focus shifts from the near to the far. In verse 23, it is clear that Jesus could not have been speaking only to His apostles, because Jesus did not return when they had gone through the cities of Israel. This probably refers partly to the Tribulation period before Christ's return. The Lord is warning believers what they will face during that time.

So what we have here is Jesus giving his apostles and his future evangelists, which includes us, an understanding of the mindset we should have on our mission. The details are not exactly the same—we don't heal lepers, or raise the dead, or ask who is worthy when we go into a town. But there are several features of this text which are timeless. I want to bring out five attitudes we should have as we go out and make disciples.

*Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves."*

What does Jesus mean by this remark? Well, there is an image in there. Picture a wolf pack, snarling, drooling and very hungry. Now picture a bunch of sheep, amongst the slowest and most harmless creatures on earth, being led out to meet the pack of agile, voracious wolves. In other words, the chances are, as you go out to share the gospel, you will be devoured. If not physically (which does happen), then intellectually, or emotionally savaged by the people you go to. God's people are supposed to be gentle people. We are supposed to be possessed with a meek and quiet spirit. And as we go about our way, unless we do something, we will be savaged.

What is that thing which Jesus tells us to do? He tells us to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves. Snakes, from the book of Genesis are portrayed as wily, subtle, and shrewd. So here is the first thing Jesus wants us to be:

### **I. Be informed—know your culture**

Be the kind of person who has the gentlest countenance, you are three steps ahead of the person you are speaking to. How can you do that? When you know your culture. When you know what to expect. When you know how people think. If you know what to expect, you are being as wise as serpents. You are avoiding the fate of being totally savaged in conversation with them.

Two weeks ago, we looked at Paul's sermon in Athens. Paul's sermon in Athens is totally different

to his sermon to the Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 22. Why? When speaking to the Jews, Paul references Abraham, and the Old Testament. When speaking to the Greeks, He speaks of creation, false worship and even quotes from Greek poets. Our Lord Jesus always knew who He was talking to - Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, rich rulers, Roman centurions, tax collectors. His responses to people were as shrewd and wise as you can possibly imagine.

What does it mean to understand your culture? It means you understand the way most people look at life. Every human being has a world view. Their world view is not what they see with their eyes. It is what they see in their minds, when their eyes look at the world. It's what they think when they think about themselves, God, others. It is their construction, however simple, of what life is really about, how it works, and why it works the way it does.

Now if two people have the same map, they can talk about directions intelligently to each other. But if your maps are entirely different, you are going to get totally confused when speaking to each other. You need to know that if you are a born-again Christian, your internal map of reality is very different from an unbeliever's. You say 'truth', and it means one thing to you, and another thing to him. You say 'heaven' and it means one thing to you, and another thing to him. Likewise with concepts like life, death, faith, love, God, eternal, hell, judgement.

These are some of the thoughts in our culture today:

- Truth is not absolute, it is personal.
- Morals are situational.
- God does not exist as a Lawgiver, but as a kind of extension of my own personal spirituality.
- No religion has all the truth.
- The most important thing is self. Religion must be therapeutic, it must benefit me, validate me, enhance me. It must never condemn me.
- All authority is suspect. Organised religion, in every form, is a sham. There has always been a hidden power conspiracy: the Bible has been changed; religious leaders have twisted doctrine to suit themselves, so you can't trust anyone. Just be true to your own beliefs.
- All knowledge is suspect. Only things I have experienced can be verified.
- I do not need to respect any tradition, obey any custom, regard any heritage, and submit to any rules. The only rule is that I must not hurt other people.
- I am a consumer, and I am always shopping not only for goods, but for experiences. They are shopping for new experiences, new entertainments, new distractions. They are trying to buy meaning for themselves.
- I am overloaded with images, messages, and information, which makes life even more unreal, pointless and meaningless.

You see, when missionaries go to another people group, they must learn the language. They must also learn the categories of thought that those people have. Once they understand it, they pick and choose from that culture to translate the message of the gospel as well as possible. This is part of how we become as wise as serpents.

But there is a second attitude that we must have. Jesus balanced out the idea of being wise as serpents, with the idea of being gentle as doves. Why didn't Jesus just stick with snakes as an image? Because although snakes are a good picture for being crafty, they are not really a good picture of being a help to people. Snakes are dangerous. Snakes are poisonous. But we are told to be as harmless as doves.

The idea is not that we should be unnoticeable or useless. Our influence upon others should not be harmful, destructive or malicious. It should be gentle, helpful and loving. In other words, we are to be loving. Jesus is telling us that the mindset of a Christian evangelist is not only shrewd, but compassionate.

## II. Be compassionate—sow in tears

*Psalm 126:5-6 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy. <sup>6</sup> He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.*

The very fact that we are being sent to people means that God still loves them: and so must you. The same Jesus indicted people for sin, and invited them to forgiveness. He gave a scathing rebuke to the Pharisees, and then finished it with these words:

**Matthew 23:37** *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*

Paul had the same heart:

*Romans 9:1-3 tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,*

But the truth is compassion for people is not something you can work up in your own heart. You are not going to feel it by just listening to “People Need the Lord” and seeing slides of people. You are going to work and live with people whose hardness to the gospel will dry up the last drop of mere human compassion.

If you want to remain gentle as doves, you are going to have to pray for compassion. You are going to have to ask God repeatedly: God break my heart for this world. Break my heart for the Jewish people of Johannesburg. Break my heart for the Zulu, the Sotho, the Xhosa, Afrikaner, the Bulgarian, the American. God break my heart for so and so at work, because when I see them, I just feel contempt.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians. He laboured feverishly amongst them until he died at the age of 29. Listen to just two of his journal entries:

November 2, 1744. "About noon, rode up to the Indians; and while going, could feel no desires for them, and even dreaded to say anything to 'em".

"Friday, June 18. Considering my great unfitness for the work of the ministry, my present deadness, and total inability to do anything for the glory of God that way, feeling myself very helpless, and at a great loss what the Lord would have to do; I set apart this day for prayer to God, and spent most of the day in that duty, but amazingly deserted most of the day. Yet I found God graciously near, once in particular; while I was pleading, for more compassion for immortal souls, my heart seemed to be opened at once, and I was enabled to cry with great ardency, for a few minutes.--Oh, I was distressed to think, that I should offer such dead, cold services to the living God! My soul seemed to breathe after holiness, a life of constant devotedness to God.

Without real compassion, the Spirit will not work mightily. It is His compassion, which He grants to willing hearts. Often that hard heart is waiting for tears to soften it and prepare it for the gospel.

## III. Be realistic— aim for ‘a pebble in the shoe’

*Matthew 10:17-18 "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> "You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.*

*Matthew 10:21-22 "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise*

*up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>22</sup> "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.*

Jesus tells his disciples what reception they can expect. He explains that the reception will not be entirely positive. Instead, it will be somewhat negative. In some cases, it will be violently hostile. Now with that information given, Jesus wants us to be realistic about the results. He is not just giving us tips for self-protection, He is telling us how the gospel is usually encountered by hard, dead hearts.

Remember what He said in John 3?

*John 3:19-20 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

Jesus wants us to know that lacking the grace of God, the response will be rejection. We've already seen why this is a miracle. But understand that we have been very influenced by a culture which wants us to produce a product, close a deal, make a sale. We want results. We want them now. We want to give a person the whole deal and then draw the net in and catch the fish.

Our goal is not to produce a product, close a deal or make a sale. We are agents of both life and death –

*2 Corinthians 2:14-17 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? <sup>17</sup> For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.*

Paul says that we don't get to decide how our message smells. Our message is the fragrance of Christ to both those being saved and those perishing. It is the state of the people who hear it that determines how it smells to them. To one group, it smells like life. To the other, it smells like death.

Greg Koukl wrote a book called *Tactics*, which I've shared with those of you in my Wednesday group. Koukl says in his book that he does not aim to convert anyone. He does not aim to get every person he talks to right to the foot of the cross. He gives two reasons for this, the first reason, as he puts it, is that in most situations, the fruit is not ripe. The person is just not ready. They have only begun to grasp some of the truths of the gospel. To drop the whole message on someone who isn't ready may mean they end up rejecting a message they haven't fully understood and are harder to reach in future. So Koukl recommends having the modest goal of putting a stone in someone's shoe. You know how when you have a little stone in your shoe, it rattles around in there in gets under your heel and your toes, and it irritates you and you can't get along without noticing it. So, the idea is, you drop some thoughts into an unbeliever's mind which the person will end up rattling around in their mind, some kind of truth which just won't go away, and continues to poke at him in a good way. It might just be that you show them the truth of moral law that they have failed to keep the laws they expect others to keep. It might be that you show them how irrational it is to think of a universe without a God. It might be that you confront them with the immortality of their own soul, and its eternal destiny. It might be that you press the claims of Jesus upon them. It might simply be that you show them how their beliefs are contradictory. Whatever it is, it is a modest goal: put a stone in someone's shoe.

The first reason why we do not have to aim to close the deal every time is that the fruit is not always ripe. The other reason leads us to our fourth point which is this:

#### **IV. Be patient—you might not harvest.**

Not all Christians are the kind of Christians who can close the deal. Not all Christians are the ones who can call for decision and pick the fruit. But all Christians should be the kind that are at least patiently planting thoughts into unbelievers' minds. We should be giving them bit by bit, reasons to believe, the message of the gospel, the effects of the gospel in our lives by example. It is OK to be a normal gardener. The harvesting Christians would not be able to do their work if you didn't do yours. So be patient.

*1 Corinthians 3:5-9 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. <sup>7</sup> So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.*

Some of us are planters, some are harvesters. Just like spiritual gifts: different roles, one body. The point is are you at least patiently sowing thoughts into the hearts of unbelievers – stone sin their shoes, being patient that it might not be you that harvests that fruit.

You may have heard of the missionary Adoniram Judson. The Judsons were rejected entrance into India to preach the Gospel to the Hindus by the East India Company and after many trying times, frustrations, fears, and failures, they finally found an open door in Rangoon, Burma.

There was not one known Christian in that land of millions. And there were no friends in that robber-infested, idolatry-infected, iniquity-filled land. A baby was born to alleviate the loneliness of the young couple, but it was to be only for a temporary time. Eight months later, Roger William Judson was buried under a great mango tree.

And there were no converts. It was to be six, long, soul-crushing, heart-breaking years before the date of the first decision for Christ. Then, on June 27, 1819, Judson baptized the first Burman believer, MOUNG NAU. Judson jotted in his journal: "Oh, may it prove to be the beginning of a series of baptisms in the Burman empire which shall continue in uninterrupted success to the end of the age." Converts were added slowly — a second, then three, then six, and on to eighteen.

The work progressed and gospel power began to open blind eyes, break idolatry-shackled hearts and transform the newly-begotten converts into triumphant Christians. On April 12, 1850, at the age of 62, Judson died. Except for a few months (when he returned to America after thirty-four years from his first sailing), Judson had spent thirty-eight years in Burma. Although he had waited six years for his first convert, sometime after his death a government survey recorded 210,000 Christians, one out of every fifty-eight Burmans! It was a partial fulfilment and a monument to the spirit and ministry of the man, who at Ava, the capital city, gazed at the temple of Buddha and challenged, "A voice mightier than mine, a still small voice, will ere long sweep away every vestige of thy dominion. The churches of Jesus Christ will soon supplant these idolatrous monuments and the chanting devotees of Buddha will die away before the Christian's hymns of praise."

## **V. Be bold—remember Who is with you.**

Though Jesus has given His disciples a pretty bleak outlook for how His message will be received, notice that He wants them to remain bold.

*Matthew 10:19-20 But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup> "for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.*

He goes on to tell His disciples not to be afraid for their own safety:

*Matthew 10:24-31* disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. <sup>25</sup> "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! <sup>26</sup> ¶ "Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. <sup>27</sup> " Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. <sup>28</sup> "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

He says the treatment you get is the same treatment they gave Me. But do not fear people who can only hurt you temporarily. Reserve a greater fear for the one who can destroy eternally, that is, God. And if you are a Christian, what is God's attitude towards you?

<sup>29</sup> "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. <sup>30</sup> "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> "Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Don't be afraid for your own safety. Don't shrink back because someone might try to intimidate you and threaten you. God is with you. God won't let a hair on your head be touched apart from his will. Don't be afraid for your reputation or image.

*Matthew 10:32-33* Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Don't try to protect your image or your reputation in front of men, it will rob you of your evangelistic power. If you believe Christ has changed you, then be what you are in front of others. Don't be ashamed of the gospel. Your message is true. They are in darkness, you have light. You are reconciled to God, they are not. God is with you. He is on your side. Do not fear, but be bold.

You're not ashamed to tell people your name, are you? You're not ashamed to tell them your birthday, or your home language. So why should you be ashamed to tell them of your identity in Christ.

It's said that during the time of Alexander the Great, one of his men ran away during battle. He deserted. However, he was caught, and after Alexander the Great had won the battle, the deserter was brought before him. Alexander sat on his throne, while the deserter was made to kneel before him. Alexander said to the man, "What is your name?"

The man replied, "My name is Alexander, your majesty."

Alexander the Great asked him again, "What is your name?"

The man hesitated, and repeated, "Your majesty, my name is Alexander."

Alexander got off his throne, grabbed the man by his shirt and pulled him up into his face.

Alexander the Great said to him, "Change your name, or change your conduct."

We now have a new name – Christians. We don't need to be ashamed of Christ, because He was not ashamed to die for us.

How's your evangelistic mindset? Are you informed – do you know your culture, like a shrewd serpent? Are you a compassionate person, harmless as a dove, praying for them? Are you realistic and modest in your goal – seeking to at least put a pebble in someone's shoe? Are you patient, willing to keep doing that? Are you bold? Do you own Christ publicly?