

- ***Read Matthew 9:35-38*** As Jesus was going throughout the cities and villages, His goal and purpose was clear. He wanted to tell all of the people about the gospel of the kingdom. He wanted everyone to hear the good news of what was coming for them. His love and compassion for those whom He came in contact with motivated Him to share with them this good news. His compassion was spurred on by what He saw within these people. He saw a people who were like lost sheep, and all they needed was a shepherd to lead them to the place of prosperity. Jesus most certainly was this person, but He knew that He would not be around forever to fulfill this need.
- Thusly, He turns to those who were already following Him and tells them of their role in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Our Lord announces that certainly the harvest is ripe and plentiful for picking, but God was in need of those who would actually go out and do the work. This world is full of people who can be described as Jesus describes them in **v.36**, "distressed and dispirited." All around us, there are individuals who are in dire need to hear the gospel of the kingdom, and Jesus says that the workers were at that time few, yet we have the ability to change that. We have the ability to grow the number of workers that are engaged in harvesting souls for Jesus.
- Sadly, we often find ourselves disengaged from this great work for a variety of reasons. Certainly apathy might be one. We don't see others as Jesus saw them. Maybe we feel ill-equipped in the work. Or it could be that we just don't know what exactly to do. This morning, I would like to take a few minutes to talk very simply about wisely sharing our faith. I've heard individuals talk about their hesitancy in sharing their faith because it can at times seem like a very daunting task. I get that, and I wouldn't argue that sharing our faith can be a scary thing at times, but I hope that what we look at this morning will help to push us over the hump and really help us to create within ourselves a mindset where we will not just know the need for sharing our faith, but we will have some wisdom that will help guide us to be more successful and efficient as we seek to work the white fields.

I. Start with the Gospel.

- A. Did you notice this is exactly what Jesus did? As Jesus went around, He didn't go around talking about any number of peripheral issues involving faith, but He focused on the most important aspect of the faith and that was the Gospel. If we boil down our faith to the very essence of what it is, we will find the Gospel. Our faith would not be what it is without Jesus leaving heaven, coming to earth, dying on the cross, raising from the dead, and ascending back to the Father as our Lord, Savior, and King. These are the barebones of the Gospel or the good news that our faith is built around. Obviously, we are not told what exactly Jesus spoke of concerning the Gospel since some of these things hadn't taken place yet, but we can look to other New Testament writers and characters and see what they taught concerning the Gospel, primarily.
- B. When I think about people who focused first and foremost on the Gospel, I think about Paul and what He said in **I Corinthians 15:1-4**. It seems obvious that this letter was not the first interaction that Paul had with these brethren. He says that before anything else, he had made known to them the Gospel of Jesus. This Gospel was what they stood upon, it was what saved them, and it was what they were to hold fast to. So what was this Gospel? Paul goes on to specify that he made known to them about Jesus dying for our sins and being raised to Glory. This was the essence of the Gospel and it is what gives our faith power. We believe upon the resurrection of Jesus, and that we too will be raised in the last day.
- C. But notice, as well, that Paul says that this was what he was first told of upon encountering Christ. Paul saw the risen Savior and Ananias confirmed to Paul that Jesus was indeed risen, and He was to be served as Lord. (**Acts 9:1-20**) This was the main focus of those who shared their faith in the first century, and we need to do the same thing.

D. I think we sometimes get so caught up in discussing other aspects of the faith that we completely forget and skip over that which is most important. We need to be telling people of the Gospel. We need to be telling them of their need for salvation because of their sin. We need to be sharing with them the redemptive message of Jesus crucified and raised. We need to be telling them of their need for faith, repentance, and baptism. Sure, it might be great if we teach them about the organization and work of the Lord's church. Sure, it is good if we are able to convince them of the error of denominationalism. It's great if we convince them of the necessity of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, the non-need of instrumental music, or how miraculous works by men have been done away with, but what good is all of that if we skip over and don't address their most pressing need which is their forgiveness of sins through faithful obedience to the Gospel? So often in the New Testament, we see men and women who focused on nothing but the Gospel when it came to sharing their faith, and I think it wise to consider their example and emulate it when we seek to do the same.

II. Don't sell the Gospel.

- A. While we want to start and focus on the Gospel in the sharing of our faith, we shouldn't feel the need to sell the Gospel in order to get others to buy in. This is something that we see done far too often in the religious community as a whole. We see many men and women who make their living by selling the Gospel as the means of being able to obtain a worry and problem free life.
- B. We often see individuals on the TV or on the internet speaking about how we just need to trust in God and speak blessings into existence. The truth is that this talk is just straight up foolishness, and we should have no part in promoting the Gospel in this way at all. The Gospel message wasn't preached so that man would be blessed in a physical fashion, but it was preached so that man might know how they ought to live in obedience and faithfulness to God. He didn't send His only begotten Son so that we might prosper physically in this life, but God sent His Only begotten Son so that we might have eternal life. (**John 3:16**)
- C. Now, this isn't to say that choosing to obey the Gospel is a sentence of living in a destitute manner for the rest of our lives. Obedience to the Gospel doesn't mean that we must be resigned to living a miserable life. Instead, we live life with a different perspective. We don't seek God and His will for temporal blessings, but we seek Him for His glory and the promises of eternal blessings. Sadly, when we share our faith, many might have the wrong idea and think that we live life of leisure and prosperity. We should be willing to tell them that just isn't the case. We choose to follow Jesus even with the knowledge that at times we will be hated by the world. (**I John 3:13**) At times we will have to make hard choices. At times we will have to give up pleasures of this world, but we do it all with a greater focus in mind. If we sense that someone is wanting to follow Jesus for any reason other than true faith and obedience, we must be quick to show them the truth that faith in Jesus comes at a price. We cannot sell the Gospel because that doesn't create true disciples.

III. Focus, firstly, on those we have influence with.

- A. We have seen so far that when it comes to sharing our faith, we need to focus on the Gospel and be sure not to sell it, but the next question is, "Well who should I be sharing my faith with?" Obviously, we would quickly respond with anyone and everyone, but remember this morning we are looking at how we can share our faith with wisdom. We are looking at what we can learn that can help us to become more successful and efficient in the sharing of our faith, and I think that one thing that greatly influences whether or not someone is receptive to the Gospel is how they view us. If we have great influence with an individual then that can greatly aid our chances of reaching them when we share our faith.

- B. I think that we sometimes read "go therefore and make disciples of all nations," and we think that if we are doing what God desires of us that we have to go overseas to some other nation to truly be doing the will of God. While I believe there is certainly a time and places for this to be done... let me suggest that there are plenty of people all around us that we have the opportunity to share our faiths with first. And it isn't that we have to go out on the street corner and preach, but we can simply give effort to reach those that we, again, have influence with. The street preacher often isn't seen as someone who truly cares for me, but we often see him as that crazy guy screaming at us, right? But our friend, family member, or neighbor who knows me and knows what I'm about... that person knows that I truly care and that person will more than likely be more willing to give a legitimate hearing and consideration when we seek to share our faith with them.
- C. And I think there is Biblical precedent for this, as well. I think first and foremost about what is written in **John 1:35-49**. Two times in these few verses we find individuals (Andrew and Philip) coming to know Jesus, they go and speak to someone they are close to (Peter and Nathanael), and they invite those men to come and meet Jesus, too. They focused on the ones they had influence on and credibility with. Think about Nathaniel's response, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" If Philip was just some random person on the street, do you think Nathaniel would've given him the time of day? My answer is no, but because Philip had some positive influence and credibility with him, we see Nathaniel giving him some benefit of the doubt and He went to meet Jesus. Additionally, Cornelius (**Acts 10**), the Philippian Jailor (**Acts 16:25-34**), and Lydia (**Acts 16:14,15**) are all examples of individuals who, after their obedience to the Gospel, went straight to their families and shared their new faith with them and many of them were saved, as well. Sure, we can do some mass sharing of our faith with anyone, but I think wisdom from these Biblical examples shows us that our best chance of having others be receptive to the Gospel is when we focus on those whom we already have influence with through our godly living, character, and faith.
- D. Speaking of Jesus, He certainly didn't know every single person in the multitudes He spoke to, but He remedied that by creating some influence and pull with the multitudes through His wisdom, sound reasoning, and miracles to persuade so many to consider His message of the Kingdom. You might throw Paul into this same category because of what he did in Athens. He created some common ground with the Athenians, gained some influence, and then was able to share the message of the Gospel of Jesus with them. (**Acts 17:16-34**) They created some influence and clout with the listeners and bettered their chances of others being receptive. Sure, we can do some mass sharing of our faith with anyone, but I think wisdom from these Biblical examples shows us that our best chance of having others be receptive to the Gospel is when we focus on those whom we already have influence with through our godly living, character, and faith.

IV. Press on through the successes and failures.

- A. Any sort of sharing of our faith can lead us to the point where we can either continue on with our efforts or we can pack it in and stop what we are doing. Sometimes we might be tempted to cease our efforts because we have had success in sharing our faith. We might think that we have done our part, so in our minds it is time for us to retire from the work of harvesting. Conversely, we might have had very little success in our efforts to share our faith, so we get discouraged and we give up because we just are not good at this part of our duty as Christians.

- B. Both of these responses are poor, and we must be better than to just stop sharing our faith because of success or failure. We ought to have the attitude of Peter and John as they proclaimed that they "cannot stop speaking" about what Jesus had done for the whole world. (**Acts 4:20**) We, as disciples, have a duty to share our faith any and every time we have the opportunity. Sometimes those opportunities might be few and sometimes they might be many. Regardless, we must press on and continue to be active in the harvest whether we have experienced success or failure. The early disciples certainly experienced both, and we will too as long as we are active.

V. Give God the glory.

- A. We've seen the how, who, and when of sharing our faith, and we will consider just a couple more additional thoughts as we conclude this lesson. As we are going about the work of sharing our faith, it can be tempting for us to get so caught up in the work that we forget or don't consider the importance of stopping from time to time and to give God the glory for what we are able to do and the fruit that it bears.
- B. It is important that we remember that this work isn't something that is of the mind of men. This harvest isn't given to us by ourselves or others, but it is given to us by the great God of heaven. It is His field, and we are simply His workers seeking to serve and glorify Him. He is the Lord of the harvest (**Matthew 9:37**) and any success that we have must be accompanied with thanksgiving being given to His glorious Name. Sure, we are the ones out planting and watering, but it is the Lord who is giving the increase, and He is due the glory and thanksgiving. (**I Corinthians 3:6,7**) It is through our God alone that we are provided the strength and ability to be about the business of sharing our faith with others so that the kingdom might grow and be strengthened. (**Philippians 4:13**)

VI. Pray, pray, and pray some more.

- A. Finally, let's close with the consideration that any work that is done in regards to the sharing of our faith must not just be accompanied with, but it must be intertwined with consistent prayer to our God. Notice that Jesus even alludes to this when He told His disciples that they needed to "beseech" (NASB), "ask" (NET) or "pray earnestly" (ESV) that the Lord would send out workers to the harvest. (**Matthew 9:38**) We have one answer to this question already from this verse, but what all can we be praying for that would aid the sharing of our faith?
- B. Firstly, as we just read we can ask that the number of workers be many. We can pray for opportunity and ability to share our faith with others. We can pray for the acceptance of others. We can pray and give thanks when times are good, and we can pray for encouragement and strength when the harvest is lean. We can pray for others who are working and for those they are working with. There are so many ways in which we can be busy praying about our efforts to share our faith that it ought to be very easy for us to fulfill Paul's command to be a people who pray without ceasing in this respect alone. (**I Thessalonians 5:17**)

Make no mistake about it...the things we have discussed this morning are not things that every single person even here this morning is a natural at doing. Yet, we must see the importance from our Lord's words in **Matthew 9** of being busy sharing our faith and reaping the harvest of souls. Let us use godly wisdom so that our efforts can and will be as successful and efficient as they can be, and may God be glorified in our efforts to grow and strengthen His kingdom. ***PRAYER***