

Evangelism – It's not an activity; it's a lifestyle!

Introduction

[Simpsons video]

When we think about evangelism our minds often turn to a variety of activities which not many of us are keen to engage in. We maybe think of door knocking and don't want to be pushing people into a hard sell like a second hand car salesman or worse – like Ned Flanders! At dinner we will always get interrupted by an automated voice selling us something we don't want or need. But you see we often think we are doing that to people when we're called to evangelise.

But we know we should so almost through gritted teeth we try – but we never can sight those times of success – people coming to faith, commitments prayed – our expectations just aren't met. I believe it's an aspect of the Christian life that nearly every one of us struggles to feel confident in. We become disheartened. As a result so many Christians decide to channel their efforts elsewhere:

Bill Hybels observes that often we try work our way out of this mandate by making the following deal with God "You let me off the evangelism hook, and I'll prove my love for you in half a dozen other ways if it kills me. That's my deal."

What I want to do this morning is look at our definition of evangelism – I want to suggest that it's not an activity; it's a lifestyle and one which we can all be released into as ourselves. It's not about techniques or sales pitches, it's about living radically for Jesus in every sphere of life and helping people to move closer to relationship with Him. We're going to look at our mandate for evangelism, our motivation, our momentum and our method. Notes available and in session in small groups.

Mandate – what is our mission?

So what is our mission, our purpose, our mandate? Why does Emmanuel Church exist?

Mission statement – "Make Jesus known, see lives transformed" That's what we're about and I want to put it to you today that it's the most important way we can invest our lives this side of eternity. It's quite that simple – what we are all about in Emmanuel church, everything we do, is about fulfilling that aim – To make Jesus known and to see lives transformed.

Let's look at the grounding of our mission in scripture. Consider Matt 28:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The risen Jesus, triumphant over the grave, now imbued with all authority on heaven and earth says "Go" – there is a world that now needs to hear about victory over death, forgiveness and meaning. It's the next step in the eternal restoration plan which had been planned from the foundation of the world, pictured in Gen 3:15, promised to Abraham in Gen 12, practice a bit by Israel in OT, and now

it's our turn! And notice we make "disciples", not converts, its not just about people putting their hands up and joining the club. Evangelism is bringing people closer to relationship with Jesus! The last works "I am with you always – we don't go as a lone ranger but as a co-labourer!"

Like the invitation give in Luke 5 – Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men! They had just seen Jesus overload 2 fishing boats with fish and now Jesus offers the same fruit in an adventure of winning souls not sole!

Mark Driscoll "We need to understand our mission with razor-sharp clarity: The mission is to be close to Jesus – as we do we are transformed into His likeness and seek to unite other people with Him."

The Christian life is about following Jesus, learning from Him, catching his heart and working with Him to transform this world. Jesus reinforces that we are to learn from His ways – John 20:21 after being resurrected he appears to the disciples shows them his wounds and says "Shalom" then after the disciples peel themselves of the ceiling he says "as the father has sent me I am sending you!"

And so I put it to you that evangelism is not an activity we engage in – it's a state of being! It's a lifestyle! When Ray Lowe was with us last he reminded us that we ARE fruit bearers in John 15 – that's who we are! It's part of our identity. But we need to learn our role – apart from me you can do nothing! That's great news – we are to bear fruit. But we do that by attaching ourselves to Jesus and abiding in Him. An identity described in 1 Peter 2:9 "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." The imagery is of the whole people reflecting God and telling of what He has done.

I also want us to be clear that this lifestyle is not an optional extra to the Christian faith. If we're not careful we can fall into a lot of finger pointing – leadership point to you, you point to travelling evangelist, travelling evangelist points to leadership. No, all the church is involved. Janet stood here last week and said: "God is doing something with all of us ... I'm an ordinary person, you're ordinary people but God wants us to do amazing stuff!"

C.S Lewis: "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose."

And so our mandate as Christians is to be released into the life of freedom that Jesus offers – and so we don't forget the other disciples but see them all about releasing us into that greater freedom. In order for football teams to win games they need to train, do laps, push-ups, ball control skills. But at the end of the day that's not what it's about as the England team know only too well. It's about winning matches. And so the discipline we're looking at are not the ends in themselves but the way in which we live out lives which reflect Christ to the world and seek to win lives for Him! It's our whole reason for existing to follow Him and display him to the world – sticking close to Jesus and displaying Him to the world in every sphere of life.

Motivation – Why should we go (is our message)

So what is our motivation for evangelism – we'll I want to take you to Luke 15. There are three parables about things which are lost: a sheep, a coin and a son. The sheep lost and found – "rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep...", "rejoice with me I have found my lost coin..."

And then the lost son – a parable we should meditate over and consider time and time again. A wayward son leaves the family, disrespects His father wishing he was dead. He rebels, squanders what he has and lives for no one else but himself. Eventually when feeding the pigs opens up some time for reflection he realises he has to return. And then we encounter some of the most amazing verses in scripture which when we fully grasp will send us out into this world with a zeal like nothing else.

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

And it's not begrudgingly that God lets us back into relationship. We see how heaven feel about lives transformed, lives lost and then found. They throw a party! There is uproar in heaven when people turn to Jesus! When you turned to Jesus! Is this the way we respond to lives transformed? On the world cup games, when South Africa scored there was this massive uproar – vuvuzelas we're being blown everywhere!

When we realise the extent the heart of our Father, the extent of his grace and love and mercy towards us, our hearts melt. And we can relate to God as our Father, not as a policeman, or a judge or Simon Cowell but as a Father! – We have a spirit which cries out – Abba, Father! We did nothing to earn it – its grace, complete unconditional favour!

This is the heart of the Gospel – that God would reach out to us in love when we had nothing to give and everything to disqualify and he lavishes His grace upon us. We are freed from working to a rulebook and the constant striving of religion. Instead we are release into a life of freedom. Let's not waste that freedom.

Let's not waste this life: John Piper paints the picture of the wasted life as he recounts the story in a reader's digest article of a couple who took early retirement and moved to Florida. Now they sail on a private yacht and collect shells along the beach. Later we picture them standing before Jesus "Look Lord, see my shells" This is the wasted life! The tragedy of the church in the west is that people are happy to live the standard life and when they die they get to go to heaven.

God says there are more of my sons out there. They've not heard about this grace. So we are commissioned to "Go". That's what we get to be part of in this life. And let's be clear on that it is only for this life. When I was helping to plant the church in Huddersfield it really hit me that we're only going to be doing this now in this life before Jesus returns. In heaven we'll be praising God, enjoying fellowship and perfect relationships embarking on another great adventure. But the one thing we won't be doing is telling people who don't know Jesus about Him. That is an adventure reserved for this life alone. And it is the single greatest activity we can be involved in!

We are called to reflect Jesus in every sphere of life and as we are transformed into his likeness I pray we echo Paul's heart in Acts 20:24 "What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God"

The Gospel in all its fullness is our motivator for action! Our motivation is our message!

Momentum – How do we get moving!

So I want to consider some practical ways in which we can increase our evangelistic temperature:

- **Admit this value has slipped and talk to God about it** – we suffer from evangelistic entropy. the second law of spiritual dynamics: a tendency to disorder and diverge from our mandate as Christians. And so we fix our eyes on Jesus. So often we tend to get distracted – to blend into the world. We need to continually come before God honestly and ask for a His heart.
- **Walk authentically with God** – Robert Coleman states that a true heart for witnessing comes from worshipping God. As we spend more time intimately with God we will have a great desire to reflect His heart and love for the lost. As we see Jesus for who he really is we will follow after him – He is radical and He is free – is this the Jesus our friends know about? see compassion, anointing, provocative statements, miracles, passion, always surprising, a heart for the lost and oppressed.
- **Spend time in selected passages of scripture** – like John 4, Luke 15, 16, 19, Acts 1-2 and 17. Find and meditate on scripture that makes our hearts beat fast for the lost. [Books + videos]
- **Review what God has done in our lives** – when we review what God has done in our lives we are motivated to share the news of that grace and mercy to others. [share testimonies]
- **Spend time with other contagious Christians** – Heb 10:24 – spur one another on to love and good deeds. Small groups is a great place to do that! Iron sharpens iron
- **Spend time with non-believers** – we need to get out of the holy huddles and spend time with real non-Christians. The problem is typically the longer we have been a Christian the fewer non-Christian friends we have. Nothing will give us more of a heart than spending time with people who we desperately want to see come to faith. God has arranged the exact times and places where people should life – [John Cairns]. [Do a BBQ]
- **Pray for friends and family** – It is so vital to our mission. We can tend to view prayer as an intercom system. But John Piper encourages us to wake up to our spiritual reality. We're in a war! (2 Cor 10:3-5 Eph 6). Let's view prayer for what it really is a war-time walkie-talkie for the accomplishment of Chris's mission.

"Prayer is the secret weapon of the kingdom of God – It's like a missile that can be fired towards any spot on earth, travelling undetected at the speed of thought and hit its target every time! Ron Dunn

How about writing down 5 friends who you will commit to pray for every day in your bible?

- **Listen to the Holy Spirit and follow God's promptings** – we need to be a people plugged into God and listening to the Holy Spirit for direction.

I want to focus on that last point. Bill Hybels: “Highest value in personal evangelism is staying attuned to and cooperating with the Holy Spirit”. Because it would be nice in many ways if we just set people off on a little conveyer belt of activities – funday, guest service, alpha course and then hey presto they’re a Christian. But it doesn’t work like that – there is no formula. We are to live every our life plugged into, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:8, Eph 6 – Sword of Spirit!

It’s a bit like a glider – a glider has an instrument than no other aircraft has – a variometer. It detects movements of the air (thermal pockets). Now a powered aircraft doesn’t need a variometer because it’s all about flyer under its own power. The glider is dependent upon the wind. Spurgeon: *Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing, we are ships without wind. We are useless*
We need another level of sensitivity. Similarly Christians are called to live with this extra instrument, an antenna tuned into the frequency of the Holy Spirit.

And so based on what we’ve talk about I’d like to put across my own definition of evangelism:

“[Evangelism is] living a life motivated by the love and grace of Christ, in full assurance of our identity as witnesses, equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit, ready to follow His direction”

Method – What do we say and do? (follow up in small groups)

I also want to encourage us to think – are we ready to share are faith. In 1 peter 3:15 we are told “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”. We’ll look at this in detail in small groups. But I want to challenge you – are you ready to do that. A friends asks you “So why are you a Christian?” or “How come you’re life if so different” – what do you say?

So we speak about it: I’d like to give you the challenge of communicating what Jesus has down in your life in only 100 words! That means you can share it in 45 seconds. Here’s mine:

When I came to university to study astrophysics the only thing I really believed in was science, I thought it answered all of lives questions. But I soon began to realise that science didn’t have all the answers. I investigated the account of Jesus life and found that what was on offer was a relationship with the creator of the universe, one I didn’t have to earn but that God would freely give me if I asked. So after investigation and deliberation I started that relationship with Jesus and now I live life on an adventure of faith with Him.

It’s not about techniques of sales pitches but we are told to be prepared. When we hear the Spirits voice telling and are presented with open door opportunities then as we reflect on the height, breadth and depth of the gospel and the work that God has done in our lives we will be able to joyfully share His good news to those God brings us into contact with.

We demonstrate it: The Gospel also came with signs and wonders. And so as we speak about the amazing news of the Gospel we are demonstrate the power of the kingdom and the heart of God. Healing on the streets is changing lives!

It involves going to the poor as we don’t elevate great commission and forget the greatest commandment! We do with love, with gentleness and respect!

We are freed to be the people God has designed us to be, using the passions he’s given us to reach a world that needs to know him. So I want to release you into actively pursuing God’s kingdom

however you feel that He's calling you to do so. For some it will be Healing on the Streets and treasure hunting. For others it will be leading an alpha course. For others it will be having conversations with neighbours over the garden fence. Street lights and bringing kingdom values of care and compassion to this community. I for one am looking forward to "the Ark" and embarking on mission to see students engage with the real Jesus as they participate in a community on a boat!

What we need to remember is that whatever our passions and desires God wants to use you to live a life that brings people closer to relationship with Him and to captivate you by His amazing love and grace. We do it together, as a church made up of people with different passions, gifting and desires. We live lives in step with the spirit, fuelled by the miracle of the Gospel and we go to bring about God's kingdom in a world now. We go with the full weight of kingdom authority behind us because Jesus says "go!" - It's about making Jesus know and seeing lives transformed!

Let's praise God for what he's doing amongst us – we are at an exciting time. Let's celebrate our success and spur one another on to love and good deeds as we set about the mission for which King Jesus sends us out. To make much of Him in every sphere of life and demonstrate and communicate the good news of His radical grace to those He brings us alongside.

Eph 2:8-10 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.