

Acts 1:8  
Local Mission: We are in this together

September 15, 2019

Intro: The focus of our time and our main text this morning is outreach - outreach for the ordinary.

God's plan to get his gospel out is through the persevering work of ordinary witness— a habitual, disciplined, joyful, Spirit-filled lifestyle of witness.

Let me begin with a question: What do you think is the biggest obstacle to evangelism? —Persecution? Are we afraid of rejection, losing relational capital, business, job?

—Culture growing more intolerant of religion, especially Christian?

- Those seem like good candidates. Really it has never been easy to share gospel truth because there is a built in offense to it (Gal 5:11—"offense of the cross").
- I think Al Mohler answers the question right: "At the end of the day the biggest obstacle to evangelism is Christians who don't share the gospel."

\*\*God's plan for getting the gospel out is not to have one man—a Billy Graham type—do all the work of evangelism. His plan is for all his people to live as ordinary witnesses.

I feel very "ordinary" when it comes to evangelism. I find it very difficult to talk to strangers, don't always know what to say, sometimes walk away feeling awkward. *But I want to obey Christ and make his glory known. That's why God has us here.*

● Definition of Evangelism: To present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people in order that they may come to put their trust in God through him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of the church. (J.I. Packer *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*)

*Main thesis: God has supplied the power of the Holy Spirit so that ordinary believers can boldly share the life-transforming gospel.*

The missionary Hudson Taylor had a saying: God's work, done God's way, will not lack God's supply. That summarizes our main points.

**What is God's Work? (1-3; 9-10)**

- First, God's work is *not finished*.
- Now the disciples are still hung up on seeing immediate things happen (Lk 19:11). They seemed more intrigued with political power.

- The disciples were preoccupied with an earthly power. Jesus redirects them to a heavenly, spiritual power.

Here is the first main lesson in evangelism: The work is largely unseen. God's work is often not seen. That may be another reason we get discouraged.

- God's work is everything he has done, is doing, and will do *through his Son*.
- These verses are really a bridge between Luke's Gospel and Acts.
- Luke emphasized what Jesus began to do when he came to the earth; Luke stresses what Jesus *continues to do through the church*.

Apply: This is vital in our thinking. If we don't believe that Jesus is actually working in our church and community, we won't be really motivated to share the gospel. But if we know he is *alive, has authority, and is actively working*, we will be vessels he can use.

1. The cross and resurrection (v3) [Past]
2. Jesus current rule from heaven (v9) [Present]
3. Jesus's return (v11) [Future]

God's work is exclusively tied to his Son; *what he has done, is doing, and will do at the close of history*. All history is connected to Jesus Christ (Col 1:18) "that in everything he might be preeminent."

Think of how different that is with us. We are connected to human history in such a microscopic level, really. We occupy a small place for a small amount of time. In 200 years from now all of our names will be forgotten. But not Christ—in 200 years his name will still be praised and worshiped—and *this is all the more true as ordinary faithful people are passing on the gospel*. Ground zero of mission, locally and globally, is extending the fame of Jesus Christ

God's Work Summary: Exalting the worth of his Son by drawing people to the life-transforming gospel, ruling over all their lives, and redeeming them for his eternal possession at his return.

Gospel: This should hit non-Christians in the room also. If what the Bible says about Jesus is true, everything you build your life on now, without him is ultimately meaningless. The purpose of life is to make much of him, not us. Life is only truly meaningful in a relationship with God through Christ.

### What is God's Way? (1:8b)

- Now our main text (1:8)—it's a command with a promise.
- If God's work is exalting the worth of his Son by drawing people to the life-giving gospel, how does this work get done?
- 1:8 packs the thesis statement of Acts and well as the geographic outline all in one.
- Here, there is purpose and a plan. God does not speak in nuance; things are not cloudy. Spread the gospel starting locally and expand globally.

The way that God exalts the worth of his Son is by the *church's witness*.

- The mandate is clear from the Lord Jesus: You will be my witnesses.
- The roots are traced back to the OT in Isaiah's day. He challenged the people of his day who followed God to be *witness*.

(Is 44:8)

<sup>8</sup> Fear not, nor be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are *my witnesses!*

Is there a God besides me?  
There is no Rock; I know not any."

*God's covenant people were always to be a witness.*

- The word translated "witness" has 3 basic meanings.
  1. One who testifies in legal matters. (Acts 6:13) - The Jews stirred up false witness.
  2. One who affirms truth. (Phil 1:8) "God is my witness"
  3. One who testifies at a cost of their life. (Rev 2:13) "Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you"

To be a witness (*martyrs*) is to speak from *personal knowledge* of facts and their significance.  
(William Larkin)

*A witness is someone who is so committed to the truth that they have no problem telling it and are willing to die for it.*

Illus: When I lived in Louisville, there was a massive ice storm that took out power throughout the city. The stop lights by our house were not working. It was a very busy intersection, similar to the one at Broad River and Kennerly. When the stop lights don't work, you are supposed to treat it like a stop sign and stop anyhow.

I came to the light and made the stop like all the other cars. There was also a teenage boy crossing the intersection on his bike. He was cautious and started to cross when suddenly a car ran the intersection and clipped him. The bike went flying in the air, and a car mirror did also. The kid turned out to be ok, thankfully, except for a broken arm. I had to stick around to give the police report. The officer wrote down everything I saw and told me I may be subpoenaed to court possibly; if so, just tell the court everything I saw. All I had to do was tell the truth.

*That's the job of an ordinary witness...testify to others (outsiders) the truth of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus intends his *whole church*, ordinary believers like you and me, to be his witnesses to the gospel.

Reasons of support

1) Biblical

● The biblical support for this is Eph 4:11-12<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to *equip* the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

- Only one person is called an evangelist in the NT—Phillip in Acts 21:8.
- The point is that those people are not to do all the work, but train and equip the ordinary believers—build up the body.
- Col 4:5 “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of time.” (v6)= have grace filled speech to answer everyone.

2) Practical.

● Evangelism needs to be understood as a spiritual discipline.

I take this from Don Whitney’s book *Spiritual Discipline for the Christian Life*.

- Ch 6

“Godliness requires that we discipline ourselves in the practice of evangelism” —Don Whitney

Spiritual discipline is exercising our God-given spiritual muscles to promote godliness. (1 Tim 4:7) “train (exercise KJV) yourself for godliness”

—Training involves a plan, often pain, and always perseverance.

If you are a runner, you have to plan days and mileage—it will hurt and you will get to the point where you may want to give up (e.g. humid SC summer).

The same is true of the spiritual discipline of evangelism. It takes prayerful planning, sweaty spiritual effort, and lots of perseverance. To be honest, it’s a lot easier *just not to do it, just like running*.

This month’s *Tabletalk* devotional is about spiritual warfare. It’s written in a C.S. Lewis *Screwtape Letter* fictional style. A senior demon is training his apprentice. The very first plan of attack: Erode Evangelism and Mission.

“Above all else, we must encourage the belief that missions and evangelism are unnecessary. Make the Christians believe that the Enemy saves whom he will without their efforts, that he does not use individual Christians as secondary means in carrying out his purposes.”

The enemy of our souls and Christ’s kingdom lies. He lies telling us we are not good at evangelism and our efforts usually fail. He lies getting our minds distracted by dozens of other things that erode evangelism and missions. Another approach is taking good theology, like God’s sovereignty, and twisting it so we become silent.

The man who taught me about God’s sovereignty died for sharing his faith. Apostle Paul.

Don’t believe the lies. God has a plan for us in our ordinary lives.

### What is God supply? (1:8a)

- God’s supply is his promise of Jesus sending his Spirit.
- In order to appreciate this the most, we need to look at it from the Old Testament foundation.
- 700 years before Jesus said this, Isaiah the prophet spoke.

The promise that Jesus refers to had deep roots of centuries.

1. Isaiah prophesies that the Spirit would be poured out in a remarkable way:

(Is 32:15)

- 15 until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest.
- 16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
- 17 And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.

\*Notice the effect of the Spirit (v17)—righteousness. That’s the heart of the gospel message. (Rom 3:22) The gospel is “the righteousness of God who through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

In other words, God’s supply for people to hear the life-saving gospel message is by clothing ordinary believers with his Spirit who will share. That gives hope that an average ordinary people like us can fulfill Christ’s mission on earth...in our backyard, living room, coffee shop, gym.

Conclusion:

Back in Feb our elders worked out a mission statement that captures our values and priorities in this season for our church. Mission statements provide *clarity* and *purpose*.

*Three Rivers exists to glorify God, by being and making disciples of Jesus Christ, both locally and globally, in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Radical dependence on the Spirit is vital for a lifestyle of ordinary outreach.

Mr. Great-heart can teach us about this. He is a character in John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*. Toward the end of the story, he guides Christian's wife and children up the hill of difficulty; he is the one who kills the Giant. *He is an ordinary character who is used in an extraordinary way. Like how God can use us.*

Listen to what he says:

"It is my duty...to distrust mine own ability, that I might have reliance on him who is stronger than all."

Ordinary outreach begins here, church. Let's pull together, distrust our own ability and fully rely on him who is stronger than all - and see what extraordinary things he will do through ordinary vessels.