

“The Gospel Worthy of Full Propagation”
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Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). There is an inherent power in the message of the Gospel. This power of God makes it a message not only worthy, but also sufficient in itself, to completely save those that are lost. Theologically, the fact of the sufficiency of the Gospel is accepted by most Baptists and Evangelicals. However, on the practical side, the sufficiency of the Gospel is under great threat. From every angle, the sufficiency of the Gospel unto salvation, allowing for its promiscuous proclamation on the highways and hedges, is under attack. These few words will unpack several passages from the Gospels, showing that the Gospel is indeed worthy of full propagation.

The sending passage in Mark 6 parallels Luke 9 and 10, and Matthew 10. However, Mark 6 is much more succinct and to the point. Four lessons can be learned from the sending passage in Mark. First, the disciples were sent out taking “nothing for their journey, except a mere staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belt,” and no change of clothes (Mark 6:8-9). As regards Servant Evangelism, in vogue today, Jesus’ command completely reversed the recipient of the service. Rather than the evangelist serving those he is seeking to reach, these commands of Christ caused the recipients of the Gospel to serve the messenger. Without the prerequisite positive response of service, the whole town was to be shunned. It would seem that Jesus’ training turns Servant Evangelism on its head.

Second, the early part of Mark 6 addressed the response of Jesus’ hometown. One must remember that Jesus spent from the death of Herod until His ministry years living in Nazareth. The fact that Nazareth was the hometown of Jesus is attested to both in Matthew 2:23 and Luke 2:39. However, Mark 6 speaks to the current fascination with Relationship Evangelism or Friendship Evangelism. Whereas God can and does work through existing relationships (Andrew shared with his brother Simon and Philip spoke to his brother Nathaniel, John 1), He does not always work savingly through existing relationships. Jesus’ hometown people are a clear example of this fact. Whereas many teach today that relationship is a necessary preparation to the Gospel, in the case of Jesus, the perfect Son of God, relationship did not prepare the Nazarenes to hear the Gospel. They were open neither to the lifestyle of Jesus, nor to His divine preaching. Mark records for us first that they were astonished at His teaching. They doubted His deity and questioned His authority. Mark then records that the Nazarenes, among whom Jesus had spent his childhood, his adolescent years, and his early manhood, “took offense at him” (Mark 6:3). Then Jesus uttered the oft repeated words, found in all four Gospels, “The prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household” (Mark 6:4). With this triple negative (as stated in Mark 6), and a triple emphasis on those closest to Jesus, we learn from Mark why evangelism is especially difficult within family relationships. In fact, Luke added that they taunted Jesus saying, “Whatever we heard was done in Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well” (Luke 4:23). While not impossible, and sometimes commanded elsewhere (Mark 5:19), Relationship Evangelism is the most difficult form of evangelism. Finally, Mark 6:6 punctuates the paragraph, “And he wondered at their unbelief.”

Since the early 1970s, Baptists and Evangelicals have regularly been told that the Gospel must be preceded by friendship and flows best across relational lines. Therefore the “Go” has been taken out of the Great Commission, and Christians have been told to “Stay” within their own sphere of influence. While not completely unprofitable (as exemplified in the example of Andrew and Philip in John 1), modern evangelism has neutered the “Go” of the Great Commission and even more seriously added relationship to the order of salvation. The Gospel is not worthy of full proclamation in most evangelism methodologies taught today.

Mark 6 provides several more nuggets of truth as regards evangelism. Thirdly, as also mentioned in Matthew and Luke, the Gospel must be shared to the point of reception or rejection. In fact, Jesus explicitly tells His disciples to “shake the dust off the soles of your feet” (Mark 6:11) if there is rejection of the Gospel. The Lamb of God and Lord of Love told His disciples to break and cease relationships with non-receptive towns. Similarly, the fracture of relationships due to the Gospel message is ever so clear in Matthew 10, where Jesus spoke of (1) a father betraying his son to death, (2) persecution due to the Gospel, (3) being maligned for the Gospel, (4) fear of rejection or persecution, (5) Jesus not bringing peace, but the sword, and (6) a man’s enemies being members of his own household. These verses speak of alienation due to the Gospel, and make it difficult to explain the a priori argument that the Gospel flows best across relational lines. By faith, God must have another purpose in mind, other than preeminently building or maintaining relationships.

Fourthly, the method of the evangelist was to be that of preaching repentance (Mark 6:12). Sharing to the point of warning another person, while not easy, is a part of Gospel proclamation. It was a part of the proclamation of John the Baptist and Jesus, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2; 4:17). Scarcely could many evangelism methodologies today be described as “preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins—to the point of rejection.”

Further lessons come from Mark 5. As far as the common view that one should meet felt needs before meeting the spiritual need, one needs only consider Jesus’ ministry to the demoniac from Gerasenes. It is obvious that a man with a legion of demons who was naked, had broken free from the chains that others had placed on him, and gashed himself with stones had tremendous emotional, psychological, relational, and physical needs. However, Jesus met none of these directly. Rather He met the man’s spiritual need, that of receiving the mercy of the Lord. Mark wrote that the townspeople observed the man who had been demon possessed “sitting down, clothed and in his right mind” (Mark 5:15). Again, Jesus turned Felt Need Evangelism on its head. He met the ultimate need first, he did not seek to gradually meet the multitude of needs in the demoniac’s life, gradually working up Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs”—as some teach today. Likewise, Jesus approached the Woman at the Well from the basis of her ultimate need, not her multitudinous emotional needs. Notice that she had been asked to meet Jesus’ physical need for water (reverse Servant Evangelism). We must take care that we don’t neuter the power of the Gospel by thinking that its path must be prepared by Felt Need Evangelism.

Let’s look at the results of Jesus’ miracles, as to the openness of those on whom or for whom He operated a miracle. Where not ten lepers cleansed in Luke 17? Yet only one returned to give thanks. Jesus had a 1:10 ratio for that miracle. His miracle was not a sure preparation for His message. How about two miracles in John? Jesus healed the sick man in John 5. Then when

Jesus makes Himself known to him, we find that the man betrayed Jesus to the Jews. In John 9, Jesus healed the blind man. When Jesus made Himself known to him, he worshipped Him. A 1:2 ratio for those healings. John 6 is even more fascinating. Jesus healed people, fed 5,000 men, and then He walked on water. Yet when He told the people that the work of God was to believe, they asked for a further sign. Then by the end of John 6, many of the disciples withdrew, leaving only the twelve. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed that one of the twelve was a devil. Perhaps Judas could not handle the lesson of this chapter? As far as the crowd goes, we come to a 0:5,000 ratio for the miraculous “Felt Need Evangelism” of Jesus feeding those same 5,000 men. If the miracles of Jesus are going to be used as prooftexts for Servant, Servanthood, or Felt Need Evangelism, then one must also take into account these ratios in the ministry of Jesus. Felt needs are not a sure preparation for the Gospel, nor do they add power to the Gospel.

Now, good works have their place in salvation, as proof of genuine salvation. However, they do not have a salvific place in conversion nor in Gospel proclamation. Yes, the love of God is shed abroad in the heart of the believer. Yes, the Christian ought to care for his own. Yes, we ought to care for the widow and the fatherless. Yes, we ought to do good to all men, especially to the household of the saints. However, none of these commands is expected of the unsaved to help them achieve salvation. Nor are any of these commands linked to any evangelism methodology in the Book of Acts. Therefore, applying Galatians 1:8-9,¹ any contemporary methodologies that emphasize a method not exemplified in the Book of Acts are not only unhelpful and tangential, they are anathema!²

Several other points may be made about Mark 5. The cleansed demoniac, a very unlikely missionary candidate, is immediately commissioned to share the Gospel without any preparatory training at all. Jesus immediately commissioned him to “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). His was on-the-job training. He did not need a prolonged discipleship program before he shared the Gospel. In fact, when the former demoniac implored Jesus that he might accompany Him, Jesus “did not let him” (Mark 5:19). This example, along with Jesus’ response to the crowds in Mark 1:35-39 and Luke 4:42-44, and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:39) show that follow-up and long-term discipleship were not the sole priority in the ministry of Jesus or the apostles. While Jesus said, “I will build My church” (Matt 16:18) and the important follow-up of baptized converts is commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, Christian nurture is ultimately in the care of a sovereign God. These examples show, however, that the Gospel is powerful to immediately and instantaneously save to the uttermost all who come to God through Christ (Heb 7:25).

These selective verses are by no means unusual oddities in the text. They represent the thrust of the Great Commission on all the pages of the New Testament. The Gospel indeed is worthy of full proclamation. It alone is able to change lives. The Gospel can save and it does save to the uttermost. We must avoid the tendency of adding human operations into evangelism, conversion, and salvation. We must by faith preach the powerful Gospel, leaving the results to God. Most of all, we must be sure that our methods are in full agreement with the full and

¹The 1599 English Geneva reads: “But though that we, or an Angel from heauen preach vnto you otherwise, then that which we haue preached vnto you, let him be accursed. As we sayd before, so say I now againe, If any man preach vnto you otherwise, then that ye haue receiued, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8-9; *Bibleworks*).

²See Luther’s commentary on the Book of Galatians.

plenary sense of New Testament evangelism. Yes, the Gospel is indeed worthy of full propagation.