

The Sermon by Ben S.
2 Corinthians 1:1-12

In our Great Truths series we come to the church's commitment to Evangelism. As Lowri has just explained Evangelism means the Gospel and the Gospel means The Good News. The Lausanne covenant of 1974 says,

"To evangelise is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the scriptures. And that as the reigning Lord, he now offers the forgiveness of sins, and the liberating gift of the spirit to all who repent and believe."

So when a Christian tells someone else about Jesus that is evangelism. Loving and serving people in the community are all very important and it enhances our witness but evangelism is primarily the act of communication. It's telling people about Jesus.

Christians are committed to telling our community the message of Christ Jesus because we worship a God who has an evangelistic heart. From the beginning he has a heart for the lost. He seeks out to Adam and Eve and tells them that one would come who would crush the serpent's head. He tells Abraham that all the nations of the world would be blessed through him. He sets aside the children of Israel as a royal priesthood to show the whole world the saving grace of God. But they failed. Jesus Christ, the word, the light of the world comes to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. He comes to seek and to save the lost. He takes our punishment for sin and then Jesus commissions his followers to go into all the world making disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father and the son and the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost he poured out the Holy Spirit so they could be empowered to witness to the whole world. God's plan for this world is that people will come to know his son Jesus before they die. God is reaching out to people today through his church. How will people be saved if no one tells them?

There are two types of Christian. David prays and looks for opportunities to tell his friends. David's friends know he is a Christian. They may not believe it but they also know a Christian is not saved by good works but by trusting in Jesus. Then there's Ben, a loving friend, spouse and father. But Ben's version of godliness removes evangelism from his life. All Ben's friends are Christians. His colleagues and neighbours know he goes to church but they think it's sort of a hobby that he does on a Sunday. But that's all they know. Why do we find it so hard to be like David? We have to be able to cope with the fear of rejection and being looked down on. In a survey 67% of people said they have a Christian friend. Of that number 20% said they'd be happy to have a conversation about Jesus. That means 80% of the time you will be rejected when talking about Jesus.

How do we keep from losing heart? 2 Cor 4:1 tells us Paul didn't lose heart because of the mercy of God. God showed him such great mercy when he was persecuting the church and then gave him, 'the chief of sinners' the great ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the gentiles. Victor Hugo wrote, "Life's greatest happiness is to be convinced you are loved." The gospel assures us that we are loved by the most powerful being in the universe. Nothing that we can do will separate us from his unending love. So, we can accept that 80% rejection because it does not make us less valued by God. We are so deeply loved by God as his children.

Secondly, Paul did not lose heart because he remembered that the results were not his responsibility. So many people in Corinth thought Paul was weak and ineffective. Paul knew that his work was to preach the gospel but it was God's work to open blind eyes, create a new heart, to convert our families and friends. Our responsibility is to point them to Jesus. (v3)

Thirdly, Paul remembers the power of God. (v6) "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," makes his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory." Referring to Genesis 1:3, Paul is saying the same power that made light shine at creation is the same power that shines light into our hearts so we can see Jesus. If you are a Christian an extraordinary supernatural experience has happened in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has spoken into your life and said, "Let there be light." It is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Don't be tempted to say, 'I don't have an interesting testimony'. Remember God's mercy, Remember it's his responsibility and remember his power.

Our responsibility is to tell the gospel truthfully. Don't change the message to make it more palatable. That would drain the message of its saving power. In verse 2 Paul says, "...we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." We must not water down the gospel but "*set forth the truth plainly.*" Even when the message is rejected it is important not to water it down. We are responsible for prayerfully looking for opportunities. We are not to force it on people but be ready if they want to talk about it.

Our second responsibility is to make much of Jesus. "*What we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants for Jesus sake.*" (v5) Evangelism is about becoming more and more self-forgetful and more and more aware of how wonderful Jesus is. We are to declare the praise-worthy deeds of God. Be prayerful, look for opportunities to tell someone the truth about Jesus. What an amazing thing God has done for the world. The gospel is good news. In doing this we lovingly serve other people for Jesus' sake. If it is obvious they don't want to talk about Jesus, stop but keep on being friendly and loving them. We are servants.

During the 1880s a group of Americans came to London to hear some of the great evangelical preachers. They listened to that great orator Dr. Joseph Parker. The sermon was scriptural. The 2,000 strong congregation hung on his every word. As they left they said. "What an amazing preacher!" Then they went to hear Charles Spurgeon with a congregation twice the size. As they listened they soon forgot where they were and who they were listening to. They found themselves saying, "What a wonderful saviour is Jesus Christ!" We need to make more of Jesus in our lives and in our conversations.