

“Where do You Fit?”
 APEST – III
 The Gift of Evangelism
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On Sunday, July 9, 2017 a group of teenagers mocked and laughed as Jamel Dunn, 31, drowned in a retention pond in Cocoa, Fla., after an argument with his fiancée. The teens recorded the incident on their phones and you could hear them saying through their laughter and jeering, “He is going to die.”, “We are not going to help you.”, “We could’ve helped but we didn’t even try to help.” When people heard this story they were angry and horrified. The desire for justice to prevail and punishment dealt out on these insensitive and cold hearted people comes out of a righteous God given anger. But we fail to see that as Christians we can put ourselves in the very shoes of those delinquents. As people pass by us today drowning in their sin and destined to sink into an abyss of eternal separation from God, most of us choose not to intervene. Only 2- 6 percent of Christians share the Good News of Jesus on a regular basis. We may not outwardly mock them and laugh at the unbeliever, that wouldn’t be Christian of us. But whatever our reasons we refuse to help them. We turn our backs on God given opportunities to reach out with the Gospel or we choose to go the route of being politically correct or socially kind and not breach the subject of salvation. Either way, like the teens and Jamel Dunn, the result is the same, when we could try to help the other in peril, nothing happened.

I believe that God’s message for us today is not to shame or condemn his children into evangelism. Jesus said ““My purpose is not to condemn you but to let my life run free within you as the Holy Spirit connects you directly to the Father” (Romans 8:1-2). It is my desire that as we hear these words today, truth will set us free and we will become convicted to lovingly and obediently be about our Lord’s calling and the mission of reaching out in the same love as Christ and share the Good News of Salvation. The “E” in APEST is for Evangelist. I have come to realize that the Church over the centuries has taken the word evangelism and confused its meaning and how it is to be carried out. So before we can clearly look at the Evangelist we must have clarity on what real biblical Evangelism is.

So what is real biblical evangelism? Evangelism is the announcement, proclamation, and/or preaching of the gospel, the good news of and about Jesus Christ. Therefore, the gospel is a communicated message—communicated in verbal and/or written form. In The Living Bible Romans 10:17 says “Yet faith comes from listening to this Good News—the Good News about Christ.” Simply put, Evangelism is done when someone tells the Gospel of Jesus to another person. Also Evangelism includes:

1. **A Warning to people about sin and the consequences of sin-** “Everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence.” Romans 3:23 (GNT) and Isaiah 59:2 says, “But your sins have come between you and God, and by your evil doings his face has been veiled from you, so that he will give you no answer.” Isaiah 59:2.

2. **An Explanation of God’s remedy for sin—the Gospel of Jesus-** Romans 3:21-22 tells us that Christ Took Our Punishment-“But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.”

3. **And lastly The Clear Call to repent (to turn from sin and to turn toward God) and believe the Good News about Jesus, by faith-** In Mark 1:15 Jesus said to the people - “The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!” And what is that Good News, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Acts 2:21.

Brothers and Sisters that is the Gospel you have just heard, that is the Good News of Jesus! Yes there are other supporting scriptures that can be used but honestly the early Church didn’t have all the New Testament scripture we have today. They just simply shared about how sin separated us from God, how God loved us and sent Jesus to save us, that Jesus paid our price on the cross and if we repent and place our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord we too can be saved and be in loving relationship with our Heavenly Father again. This simple yet powerful message of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit changed the World and changed the eternal destination of millions all to the Glory of God.

But over time the Church has become awash with various false beliefs about Evangelism and what it is. Now that we understand what God intended evangelism to be, we can more noticeably comprehend the ways we have been doing it wrongly and make the proper changes. There are many activities and well intentioned notions that Christians today have come to believe as Evangelism. When in fact they are means that evangelism can be delivered. Like a person being transported in car. The vehicle can change but the person remains the same.

So what isn’t evangelism?

Missional Service/Social Working- “Proclaim the gospel wherever you go. Use words when necessary.” The biblical version will be “Proclaim the gospel wherever you go. Words will always be necessary.

Winning Religious Arguments- It is necessary and important to be able to defend what we believe, but arguing or debating and evangelism is not the same thing.

Repeating a prayer-If your goal is to talk someone in to repeating a (sinners) prayer, then you are committed to manufactured results, not evangelism.

Evangelism is not inviting someone to church/or Church function-This is important, and it may work in conjunction with evangelism, but it is not evangelism.

Evangelism is not simply supporting local, national and overseas Evangelists and/or Missionaries- This is needed, but if this is all we do we are in danger of outsourcing our evangelistic responsibilities.

Evangelism is not sharing our Testimony- A personal story of what Christ has done in and through your life since you placed your faith in him for salvation is a beautiful and powerful testament of the love of our risen Lord. But, this is only sharing your individual experience with the unbeliever; evangelism is sharing Christ's story with them and God's means of extending a saving relationship to them.

There are different approaches people have used in delivering the Good News. But we must always remember regardless of the type of method used it is essential the Gospel of Christ be communicated for it to be true evangelism. I will only discuss the ones that the majority of Christians will find themselves utilizing to deliver the Good News:

Personal Evangelism- Jesus talking to the woman at the well. Philip talking to the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Lifestyle Evangelism- the way we live is a testament to the work of Jesus in our lives, however this only provides a witness and hopefully spurs the unbeliever to inquire "why" we live in such a loving manner. At this point a Christian should be ready to articulate the Gospel: 1 Peter 3:15 (NLT) - "If you are asked about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it."

Testimonial Evangelism- We will share our story with others to tell them the miraculous and loving relationship we have with Jesus and in turn the listener might want to hear the Gospel.

Now that true evangelism has been laid before us and three modes of sharing it is given to each one of us what are we to do? As followers of Jesus we have been commissioned, assigned, ordered by our Lord to be individual messengers. Each and every one of us are responsible to carry this Good News to the masses. But in today's mindset of Christ being our friend and our sacrificial lamb we fail to remember he is also the King of Kings and has been given all power and authority over Heaven and Earth. Friends won't tell friends what they are to do and sacrifices don't make demands of people. Have we forgotten that we are servants of Jesus? In Romans 1:1 Paul says in his letter: "This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News." (NLT). But this is not just Paul's calling! Individually and collectively Christians are tasked by our Lord with delivering this message of resolution to all people. The Bible says, then he (Jesus) told them, "As you go into the entire world, proclaim the gospel to everyone." Mark 16:15 (ISV). Is this not clear enough for anyone to understand. Yet, I would be wrong and unloving to not tell you brothers and sisters that there are statements of caution for God's people in his Word referring to disobedience. Consider this warning- "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him," 1 John 2:3-4 (ESV). Announcements like this are there for us to deeply reflect as to where our loyalty and obedience truly lay: with God, ourselves or the world.

For many of you this is not breaking news. You have probably known of this personal calling of individual evangelism for a great deal of years now. But what stops us? What are our fears and hang-ups? Why do we not open our mouths to be obedient to our Father and help others out? Here are 2 reasons: 1) I don't know what to say. But we will memorize gobs of information concerning jobs (operational tasks), school (information for exams) and hobbies (whole songs); and 2) I don't want to offend/anger anyone. But I am sure that there have been times in most of our lives were we confronted a loved one or friend about issues and situations that they were in to warn them about the dire consequences of their actions.

I believe there are deeper motives that prevent us from declaring the Gospel to the World: we are lacking a greater faith in God, a deeper love for God and others, and we don't take sin and its consequences seriously. These 3 things culminate into a lack of courage, more regard for our own well-being and self-will, and unbelievers remaining in spiritual death and separation from God. Understand this: The same faith that saves us is the faith that can propel us into courageous action. Is it not the same Jesus that our faith is in? He is the one that conquered death, walked on water, calmed storms, casted out demons and healed the sick. Can he not protect you and guide you in this mission. Have Courage for your God is with you- God said to Moses, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."... "8 The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 (NIV). As faith grows in the person and realism of who God truly is we will be braver in our actions. When we realize the immensity of our God and truthfulness of his promises to be with us will grow a backbone to face people confidently: Psalm 56:3-4 says "when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise— in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" Therefore be courageous, not because of whom you are, but because of whom your God is! Trust in him and have faith!

Jesus told his disciples "If you love me, keep my commands." John 14:15 (NIV). He also said, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13 (NLT). Is not sharing the Good news with people a culmination of these two scriptures, demonstrating our love to God through obedience to his commandment of sharing the Good News and laying aside our comfort and selfishness and telling them about reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus.

One thing most people nowadays do not want to talk about and accept is the reality of sin, and unfortunately this is just as common in the Church as it is in World. It has gotten to the point where even preachers and teachers of God's Word slide around the outskirts of the topic and focus on feel good messages and faddish themes to keep the masses happy and not upset anyone. We have to get back to the concrete biblical understanding that sin is death! It is a cancer that has devoured our souls and a virus with 100 percent mortality rate! Anyone without Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord are dead and separated from God. And let us not fool ourselves with the unbiblical idea that it is Satan or Hell that they are being saved from, but the Holy wrath of God upon the curse of sin in man. Please, we must take advantage of the time given to us and reach people with God's offer of deliverance through his Son Jesus. Romans 5:9 (ERV) says: We have been made right with God by the blood sacrifice of Christ. So through Christ we will surely be saved from God's anger.

I want to tell you something that I found is incredible and will lift a weight from your shoulders like it did mine. When we begin to trust in God that we have no mortal to fear and when we realize that all we are being asked to do is share with others a message of freedom from real everlasting death, sharing the Gospel becomes easier. More importantly what has truly helped me in evangelizing is that I recognize God hasn't put the burden on me to save anyone. If I can't save myself how could I ever save anyone else? No! God does all the rescuing: The Holy Spirit convicts the person of his sinfulness, need to repent and reveals the soul saving work of Jesus on the cross, God the Father draws the person to Christ and Jesus meets them and offers deliverance in place of their faith in Him. The results of evangelism is solely between God and that person.

So what is an Evangelist? An Evangelist is a person called to passionately seek out opportunities to share the gospel with others and be used by the Holy Spirit to lead them to acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. They are the recruiter and good news teller. They are also tasked to teach and coach other Christians to do evangelism.

Five characteristics or benefits of Evangelists:

The Lost & Found Department of the Church

The Church's Conscience for the Gospel

Provides Spiritual Intuition

Builder of the Church

Help other's discover the creativeness and expression found in the Holy Spirit

Drawbacks (the shadow side) of Evangelists:

Interests can be more relational than doctrinal

Less than mature Evangelists can fall into salespeople mindset

Pragmatists-what works for me can work for everyone

Method over Message

Develop a Personality Cult

Here is a perfect example of a Christian God also called to be an Evangelist. Notice how he handled a more drastic situation of drowning: His name was John Harper. We all know the story of the Titanic, a British passenger liner, struck an iceberg off Newfoundland on the night of April 14-15, 1912, and sank. There is part of that story, however, that is not widely known. One of the passengers on the Titanic was a godly Pastor from Scotland, by the name of John Harper. Harper had recently spent three months ministering at the Moody Church in Chicago, during which time the church had experienced one of the most wonderful revivals in its history. He had not been back in Britain long when he was asked to return and continue his ministry. He quickly made arrangements for himself and his six-year old daughter, Nana, to travel back to American on board the Lusitania. However, he decided to delay their departure for one week, so that they could sail on a new ship, the Titanic, which was about to make its maiden voyage. On Sunday the 14th of April, 1912, the day when the iceberg was struck, the weather was fine, the sea calm. Harper attended the church service for the passengers. His niece reported that later that afternoon she saw her Uncle speaking individually to people about their souls. It seems he was in the habit of seeking out the lost sheep wherever he went.

The Titanic struck the iceberg at 11:40 p.m. on April 14, 1912. As the call was issued for passengers to vacate their cabins, Harper wrapped his daughter in a blanket, told her that she would see him again one day, and passed her to one of the crewmen. After watching her safely board one of the lifeboats, he removed his life jacket and gave it to one of the other passengers. One survivor distinctly remembered hearing him shout, "Women, children and the unsaved into the lifeboats!" Harper knew that believers were ready to die but the unsaved were not ready. Harper then ran along the decks pleading with people to turn to Christ, and with the ship sinking, he called upon the Titanic's orchestra to play, "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Gathering people around him on deck, he then knelt down, and "with holy joy in his face" raised his arms in prayer. As the ship began to lurch, he jumped into the icy waters and swam frantically to all he could reach, beseeching them to turn to the Lord Jesus and be saved. Finally, as hypothermia set in, John Harper sank beneath the waters and passed into the Lord's presence; he was 39. Four years later, a young Scotsman by the name of Aguilla Webb stood up in a meeting in Hamilton, Canada, and gave the following testimony:

I am a survivor of the Titanic. When I was drifting alone on a spar that awful night, the tide brought Mr. John Harper of Glasgow, also on a piece of wreck, near me. 'Man,' he said, 'Are you saved?' 'No,' I said, 'I am not.' He replied, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' The waves bore him away; but, strange to say brought him back a little later, and he said, 'Are you saved now?' 'No,' I said, 'I cannot honestly say that I am.' He said again, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' and shortly after he went down; and there, alone in the night, and with two miles of water under me, I believed. I am John Harper's last convert.