

The Soul Winner

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles with me, please, to Proverbs chapter 11 and verse 30. Now, I don't know what page this is in the Black Pew Bibles. Maybe someone could tell me what page this is.

Proverbs 11 verse 30. 502. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

And whoever captures souls is wise. The mid-19th century in Scotland was a season of great spiritual revival.

God raised up men and women and filled them with the spirit of personal evangelism. Such a man was Andrew Boner. He and his best friend, Robert Murray McShane, spearheaded what was perhaps the greatest spiritual renewal in Scotland's history.

In 1838, McShane and Boner visited Israel, where they engaged in mission to the Jews. And while there, Boner bought two olive trees.

[1 : 10] And when he returned home, he planted them in the front garden of his Perthshire manse. Convinced of the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, he gave them names.

One he took from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 3. Wait for it. It will surely come. Funny name for an olive tree, right? But the other he took from this verse, Proverbs 11, verse 30, taken from the King James Version.

He that winneth souls is wise. He that winneth souls is wise. Later, when he was called to Finiston Free Church, just down the road a wee bitty, and then built his church on Derby Street beside Kelvin Grove Park, he ordered that above the door be inscribed in Hebrew were to be the words, He that winneth souls is wise.

Now, while this church has been converted into flats now, the inscription is still there. You can still see it in Hebrew. He that winneth souls is wise. Through his ministry in Finiston, tens of thousands of Glasgow's peoples became believers.

He was, Andrew Boner, arguably the greatest evangelist in Scotland's history. His evangelistic zeal was tireless. When you read his sermons, they remind us of a skilled archer firing his gospel arrows straight into the hearts of his listeners.

[2 : 43] But outside the pulpit, he was engaged in extensive personal evangelism and in organizing multiple missionary endeavors in our city and beyond. He was an outstanding advocate for Jewish mission.

He believed, as we all should, that unless the church engages in serious mission to the Jews, it will see no blessing in its evangelistic mission to the Gentiles.

Boner was a brilliant academic. He was fluent in Greek and Hebrew, the languages of the Bible. But in the last analysis, what stands out about Andrew Boner is encapsulated in those words inscribed above the door of his church on Derby Street next to Kelvin Grove Park, which after the service tonight, if you're not coming to Samson Sausages, please go and take a look at.

He that winneth souls is wise. That's what drove Boner. And that's what will drive us as 21st century Christians to spend and be spent for the gospel.

That true gospel wisdom isn't seen in isolating ourselves from our needy world, but in deep engagement with our needy world and proclaiming to them the greatest news it could ever hear, that Jesus has died and risen again and that to every single man and woman the forgiveness of sin and eternal life with him is offered freely.

[4 : 26] For the next two sermons, I want us to think through the words of this verse, Proverbs 11 verse 30, as taken from the King James Version, the fruit of the righteous is as a tree of life and he that winneth souls is wise.

The person whose life is fixated on proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to a needy world, he or she is the one who is truly wise.

Scotland's greatest need today isn't for a better government, although we do need that. Scotland's greatest need is for the church to prioritize personal evangelism, to be fearless proclaimers of the gospel and to win souls for Christ.

Now this evening I want to ask two questions. First of all, why become a soul winner? Why prioritize evangelism, personal evangelism above everything else?

And secondly, who can be a soul winner? Next time we'll look at other questions. But tonight, why become a soul winner and who can be a soul winner? The aim of these two sermons isn't to become all nostalgic about Victorian spiritual awakenings, but to drive home to each of us the challenge and the joy of personal evangelism and to give us the courage that we too can win souls for Christ.

[5 : 59] So first of all, why become a soul winner? Why engage in personal evangelism? We need strong reasons to change deeply entrenched lifestyles.

The middle-aged man who is obese and smokes has a heart attack. This heart attack is all the reason he needs to give up smoking and to lose a wee bit of weight.

What will it take for us as Christians to deprioritize other things in our lives in order to make personal evangelism the highest priority?

Let me suggest the following three reasons taken from our text. First of all, because it is the fruit of righteousness. Second, because it's the greatest need of souls.

And thirdly, because it's God's perspective on wisdom. First of all, the first reason why we engage in personal evangelism is because it is the fruit of righteousness.

[7 : 06] Our verse begins with the words, the fruit of the righteous is as a tree of life. Immediately following is God's call to winning souls.

The inference is that winning souls or personal evangelism is an integral part of the Christian's fruit-bearing. One of the ways that we show we are Christians is by sharing the gospel.

It's important that we live righteous and holy lives as Christians, but it's also important that we show we are Christians by sharing our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now here we have a lost element in Christian discipleship. In the New Testament, although Paul and the other apostles preached the gospel, by far the greatest method used by the Holy Spirit was that of ordinary Christians spreading the gospel.

So for example, when the persecution in Jerusalem scattered Christians over the entire Roman world, we read in Acts 8:4, now those who were scattered, those ordinary people, went about preaching the word.

[8 : 18] Some went to Cyprus, greatest island in the world, share the gospel there. Some went to Syria. Others went to Turkey. Some went to Greece. Some went to Egypt.

Others went to Spain. Some went to North Africa. To be a Christian for them was to be a gospel sharer. When this changed, I do not know, but the growth of the early church was almost entirely down to ordinary believers like us sharing the good news of Jesus with non-Christians.

But not only is sharing the good news an important way to show that we're Christians, it's an important way to grow as Christians. It is an unspoken means of grace for the Christian by which we ourselves are strengthened in our own faith in Jesus.

If we share the gospel with someone else, it calls us to be confident enough to share the gospel with someone else. That's one of the reasons that so many Christians in the early church persevered in their faith, even under persecution.

They were active in the sharing of their faith. In Philemon chapter 1, verse 6, Paul prays, saying, I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

[9 : 50] Until recently, in our tradition, the mark of someone having become a Christian was that they came out to the prayer meeting and they started having communion. And by that, they weren't just showing that they were Christians, but they were growing as Christians.

For New Testament Christians, evangelism served the same purpose. Could one of the reasons our faith be so weak is that we have neglected this important means of growth?

When I became a Christian at the age of 15, the person through whom I was converted told me I should tell someone straight away. In the West, we have relegated faith to being a private matter. But we cannot keep faith in Christ private without remaining spiritual pygmies for the rest of our lives.

Evangelizing is the fruit of righteousness. It's not enough that we stop swearing. Many people, and most of them non-Christians, don't swear. It takes a Christian to replace those words of cursing with words which communicate the good news of Jesus.

[11:09] It is not enough that we turn away from sexual immorality because many people, and most of them non-Christians, don't engage in sexual immorality. It takes a Christian to stop objectifying the human body and share the gospel with that person instead.

And so the question is, if sharing our faith in personal evangelism is a mark of being a Christian and a means by which we grow as Christians, how do we measure up?

It is the fruit of righteousness. Second reason, because it is the greatest need of souls. Because it is the greatest need of souls.

Twenty years before McShane and Boner went on their journey of discovery to Israel, a boy called William Chalmers Burns was accompanying his parents on a walk down Argyle Street next to the Trongate in Glasgow.

And his parents realized that he was no longer with them and they went looking for him. And they found their son down an alley crying out and saying, oh, the people, the people.

[12:20] You see, we think Glasgow City Centre is bad now. But 200 years ago, the depravity of the Trongate was much worse than it is today.

Public drunkenness, public prostitution, desperate poverty was in full display. William Chalmers Burns was deeply affected by the misery and need of these people.

Later, when he became a minister, Burns preached for McChain during his visit to Israel and it was then revival broke out in Dundee. As a boy, Burns understood something that many of us don't understand our whole lives through.

Namely, that without Christ and his gospel, humankind is lost in sin and misery. Now, you know I'm a kind of depressive fellow, right?

I've recently taken to sitting outside the church here, sitting on one of the lovely benches we have, watching people walk past and engaging in a few conversations with them and giving them a Christian tract.

[13:30] And when I watch people walking up Crow Road, the thought goes through my mind, and again, remember the kind of person I am, in a hundred years' time, every one of these people will be dead.

Every single one of them. will be dead. And they'll all have faced the judgment seat of God. Some who walk past are students. Others are down and outs.

Some of them have parked their Ferraris in the car park opposite. Still others are long-time locals. But the thought goes through my mind whenever I see them walking past this door, in a hundred years' time, every single person I know will be dead and will have faced the judgment seat of God. Do we believe in the coming judgment when all who have lived and died without Christ shall be condemned to an eternity without Christ? Do we believe that?

That's what the Bible teaches. If we do, then how can we passively stand back and say and do nothing? William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was prompted to get serious about mission when he had a dream where he was hanging over hell.

[14:50] It terrified him. Don't we see that the greatest need of Glasgow's peoples is that they hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ in faith?

Because only then shall they win through the judgment of God. But how shall these people hear as they walk up and down Crow Road? Unless we Christians, share the good news with them.

Will their blood be on our hands on that day of judgment? I guess few of us have ever saved a life in an act of courageous heroism. Some of us may have, and that's a very noble thing.

Perhaps you've saved the life of a child who was standing in the middle of the road. Or perhaps you've dived into a river to save a struggling swimmer. Most of us wouldn't think twice about saving a life if we had to.

But to share our faith, for some of us that's just a step too far, right? Even though saving a soul is entirely as important as saving a person's life.

[15:59] Will their blood be on our hands if we fail to say something? what about we act with a bit of nerve, a bit of bravery, a bit of courage, and share the gospel with them, telling them the good news of Jesus and his invitation to believe in him and be saved from all their sin.

Ah, they'll probably reject what we say, politely or impolitely, but in a hundred years' time, at least they won't stand before the judgment seat of Christ with the excuse, no one ever told me.

When Thomas Chalmers became a minister, he wasn't a believer. He only became a believer a few years after becoming a minister. And when he was asked about the change in his thinking which had led him to become an evangelical preacher, he responded this way.

He was an outstanding mathematician. Read his stuff on astronomy and mathematics, and you'll be amazed at the intelligence of Thomas Chalmers. But he responded to the reason why he had become an evangelistic preacher by saying, he said, I had not reckoned with two magnitudes, the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

The shortness of time and the length of eternity. do we take heaven and hell seriously such that we see that the need of the human soul is to be one for Christ?

[17 : 41] Then we'll pluck up the nerve to publicly share the gospel with our family and friends because it's the most loving thing we can do. It is the greatest need of souls.

people. Then thirdly, the third reason why we share the gospel, become soul winners, is because it's the perspective of God on wisdom.

You know, we think so differently from God. For those of us, the people we respect the most are pop stars, sports people, and the super wealthy. We teach our children to be the best they can be, and we instill into them the western dream of upward mobility.

Doubtless, that's a good thing. But what does God think? From God's perspective, it doesn't matter how well we can sing. It doesn't matter how good we are at sport.

It doesn't really matter what we do as jobs. From God's perspective, what's important is our relationship to Him. True wisdom, according to our text, consists in the pursuit of soul-winning.

[18 : 54] Nearly 30 years ago, a Christian friend of mine introduced me to an old man in my student years. I can't remember the guy's name. He spoke with a broad, Ebardonian accent.

I mind them telling me he was 88 years old, and through his sharing the gospel and personal evangelism, 88 people had become believers in Christ.

one for every year he had been alive. Do you not think that's a life wisely lived? Most of the early New Testament Christians were incredibly poor, but through them sharing their faith in Jesus, the whole world was turned upside down.

Don't you think that's real wisdom? Internally as the church, we squabble about things that mean nothing, while externally tens of thousands of people are headed for a lost eternity without Jesus.

Next time we think about taking issue with something in the church, let's ask ourselves, how will this impact the ability of the church to engage in mission? Sometimes the most foolish people in the church are those we most highly respect because for all they may be high profile in the church, they have not and do not engage in any form of personal evangelism and they're therefore not soul winners.

[20 : 24] I remember a very heated argument in a church court, I hasten to add it was not here, about the correct use of apostrophes in a sentence.

What a foolish waste of time! Everything should be done decently and in order, but everything should be done, right?

Maybe rather than instilling the western dream of health and prosperity into our children, we should focus on modeling for them both by an example and our word what it means to be truly wise in the eyes of God, namely to devote ourselves to him and to the sharing of the gospel in personal evangelism.

Two weeks ago when Evan read out those statistics about how many people have become members of the congregation under my ministry, I can point to many, many people who have been converted wonderfully through my preaching by God's grace, but I hang my head in shame at how few, if any, I have won to Christ through my personal evangelism.

A well-respected friend of mine, Ian Hamilton, who is now retired, was asked recently about his regrets in the ministry, and he regretted, he admitted that he regretted that in his visitation to his people's homes, he had not been more direct with them about their need to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves.

[22 : 00] You know, to be wise in the eyes of God sometimes means we'll be desperately unpopular in the world's eyes, and sometimes we'll even be unpopular in the church's eyes.

But tell me, are we living for the world's favor, or God's favor? God considers soul winners wise. For all our theological degrees, for all our health and prosperity, and the wonders of our careers, we can really be very foolish.

We need these strong reasons to change the habits of a lifetime. Are these three not strong enough to become personal evangelists? Because it's the fruit of righteousness, because it's the greatest need of souls, and because it's God's perspective and wisdom?

Why become soul winners? Well, secondly, and very briefly indeed, who can become a soul winner? Who can become a winner of souls?

Who can be a personal evangelist? The answer to this question from the text is very simple.

Anyone whose soul has been won for Christ can become a soul winner for Christ.

[23 : 12] Anyone whose soul has already been won can become a winner of souls. Anyone who has come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is qualified to share the good news of Jesus in personal evangelism.

everyone and anyone, no exceptions. In other words, every Christian is invited, young, old, male, female, and yes, even expected to become a soul winner.

It was ordinary Christians who were responsible for the gospel spreading across the entire Roman world. They themselves had been won by the love of Christ, and now they were out on mission to tell others of the love of Christ that had changed them.

It wasn't a Peter, Paul, and John who turned the world upside down. It was ordinary Christians with their courageous proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ under pressure.

They were eternally grateful that Jesus had died and risen again to take away their sins, and they lived in the continual awareness that Jesus could return at any time, so they shared the gospel, and they won converts.

[24 : 28] Perhaps in Scotland we become a little too dependent upon ministers to do all the gospel sharing. As I said earlier, in my own experience as a minister and as a Christian, ministers are no different from anyone else in our responsibility to personally evangelize.

It is all our responsibilities to evangelize, not just the minister. The primary place where our evangelism is to be conducted isn't the walls of this church building, but over our dinner tables, in our workplaces, in our social clubs, and when I'm going for my run with bats flying overhead speaking to the guys running with me about church.

But then again, perhaps in Scotland, in the West, in fact, we become a little too dependent upon evangelism training courses like Christianity Explored and A Passion for Life. Now, don't get me wrong, these are good courses, but God doesn't call us to learn about evangelism.

But to do it, you didn't need a theological degree or to be an expert in mission to engage in evangelism. All you need is to be aware of people's need, to be thankful for the cross, and aware of the second coming of Jesus.

No amount of training or preparation replaces actually getting out there and standing on Crow Road and sharing the gospel one-to-one with another person. But then again, others of us think that our circumstances militate against us engaging in personal evangelism.

[26 : 10] Too old, too busy, too young, whatever. These aren't reasons. These are excuses. One of the oldest members of our congregation, in fact, I think she is the oldest, was in hospital recently.

And when I sat with her, I realized that she had taken every opportunity she could get to share with the doctors and the nurses and her fellow patients that she was a Christian and she was explaining to them the hope she had in Jesus.

If we have any friends or colleagues at work, if we are members of any clubs at all, we have all the opportunities we could ever want or need.

There are no reasons. There's just excuses. Just think. If every person in our congregation shared the gospel with one other person per week, over 10,000 of Glasgow's peoples would hear the good news about Jesus in the next year.

10,000. It may be true, and I guess it's right, that we need ministers who are better at preaching the gospel than we do. But is it not even truer that we need Christians to be better at personal evangelism than we are?

[27 : 37] Next time we'll consider how we go about engaging in personal evangelism, but without these foundations of why we must evangelize and who should do the evangelism, we'll never get off first base.

Now this is challenging teaching, and I'm not saying it's easy for any of us, myself included, but it's totally necessary in our day if we're to see another great spiritual awakening in our city.

The last thing we need, listen to this carefully, because it affects everything about us, including our church planting ethos. The last thing we need are Christian ghettos congratulating ourselves on how healthy our churches are.

The first thing we need are Christians willing to go out, develop a backbone, and get involved in the non-Christian world around us, fearlessly sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

There is so much more to be said, but rather than sugarcoat or dilute the message of tonight's sermon, we close with the words, go and make disciples of all nations, for he that win of souls is wise.

[28 : 59] Let's go and make a Mol televote. 15 years later, the second thing we need a war will to be right about the light the supuesto death and joy of us.

So what we need is our ambition is, in the way, my future trails, and piro, my hope you can will be choose the knowledge of us.

willing, regardless of mapping we