

Caleb Evans (13)

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[0:00] And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.

! When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, last week I made a point of noting that given the seriousness of the topic that I was addressing, I wouldn't begin with a joke or a humorous anecdote.

I heard our deacon giggle. I think he knows where this is going. This week I'm also talking about a very serious topic. It's a topic that involves the difference between life and death.

It involves the difference between heaven and hell. But there is a joke that is such a perfect beginning. For this topic I want to talk about this morning that I couldn't pass it off. So, here goes. What do you get when you cross a Unitarian with a Jehovah's Witness? Heard this one before? Someone who knocks on your door but isn't sure why.

[1:23] Now, if you haven't figured it out yet, what I'm talking about this morning is the topic, the important topic of evangelism. I want us to think about why we evangelize and what our gospel passage for this morning has to teach us about evangelism.

I'm also kicking off a new sermon series this week. Now, for the next few weeks I'll be talking about the disciplines and the responsibilities of the Christian life. I've decided to call this series Walking with God.

Now, you may be wondering why, if I'm talking about the disciplines and responsibilities of the Christian life, I'm starting with the topic of evangelism. That seems a weird place to start.

I have a couple of reasons for doing that. First, this week's gospel reading was so perfect for the topic, and I didn't want to change the lectionary and then come back and change it again later. But, more importantly, evangelism is an area that comfortable Western Christians, and I include myself in that number, struggle with. Praying?

[2:28] We can do that. Giving? We can do that. Reading the Bible? No, we can do that. But evangelism? That one hurts a little bit, doesn't it?

This may be the Christian responsibility we struggle with the most. Because it involves risking rejection, it involves risking ridicule, and yes, if we seek to evangelize, sometimes it's going to be a painful experience for us.

There's no getting around that. But I want to remind us all this morning that it is worth it. It's worth it because the gospel that we say that we believe is actually true.

It's worth it because the people that we run into in our daily lives have eternal souls, and one day they will stand before God and be judged. If we believe that, we have to believe that it is worth it. Now, going back to our cross between a Unitarian and a Jehovah's Witness knocking on doors for no apparent reason, that joke actually provides a good example for us to use to examine our hearts, as ridiculous as that might sound.

[3:44] Now, the Unitarians have no gospel, and the Jehovah's Witnesses have a false gospel. But here's the thing. I've had people from groups like that try to convert me to their religion.

Now, not Unitarians, because I'm not sure they know what they believe. But I've had Jehovah's Witnesses try to convert me. I've had Mormons try to convert me.

And I suspect I'm not alone in that regard. Have you been on the receiving end? Yep. What that tells me is that these groups, even though they don't believe the biblical gospel, still care enough about their religion to try to convert other people.

What about us? As Christians, we believe the true gospel. We know Jesus Christ. Are we willing to share the truth of what we believe?

Because it looks like others who don't believe the gospel of Jesus Christ are more willing to share what they believe than we are to share what we believe. And this really is a widespread problem. [4:55] Christianity Today, this past week, reported on recent research of millennial Christians, Christians of mine and Deacon Mark's generation.

And here's what they found. They found something very interesting. Nearly half, that is 47%, of practicing Christian millennials, churchgoers who consider religion an important part of their lives, believe that evangelism is wrong.

They're more than twice as likely as their parents and grandparents, boomers and elders respectively, to say that it's wrong to share one's personal belief with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith.

The article goes on to note, Barna president David Pinneman points to the rising cultural expectation against judging personal choices.

Practicing Christian millennials were twice as likely as Gen X and four times as likely as boomers and elders to agree with the statement, if someone disagrees with you, it means they're judging you.

[6:05] Let me be blunt. What this means is that my generation has been taken in by a stupid lie.

It is not wrong to share Jesus with people in hopes that they will become Christian. We are supposed to do that. If we believe that Christianity is true, then we should be trying to persuade everyone we can that Christianity is true.

If it's true, we should be trying to persuade everyone of its truth. And if it's not true, then we're all wasting our time and we could be sleeping in this morning.

As C.S. Lewis put it, Christianity, if false, is of no importance and if true, is of infinite importance.

The only thing it cannot be is moderately important. Now, Jesus told Peter that he would be about the business of catching people, of sharing the truth of Jesus with others so that they might be saved.

[7:26] Now, we see Peter doing that in Acts chapter 4, where Peter confronts a whole bunch of religious leaders, presumably who don't know Jesus, with the gospel message.

Peter says this, This Jesus is the cornerstone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

And note what he says here, And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved.

My brothers and my sisters, this is why we must be seeking to catch people. This is why we must be seeking to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.

This is why we must always be diligent in sharing the gospel, because there is salvation in no one else but Jesus. There is no other name than the name of Jesus which can save us.

[8:37] Do you believe that? And this is important. We should be seeking to share the gospel, because me believing what I believe, and you believing what you believe, doesn't make a whole lot of sense, if we acknowledge that there is only one way to salvation, and that is through Jesus Christ.

Because any other way to attempt to be right with God will fail us. Our best attempts to be good won't save us. Our being really religious won't save us.

Our sincere attempts, no matter how sincere they are, to be right with God outside of Christ will not save us. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can save us. We're hesitant to say that, aren't we?

We're shy about talking about that. If we live in a time and in any culture that shies away from things like absolute truth, seems awfully narrow, doesn't it?

To say that we can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ seems terribly closed-minded. That is what people think. And that is why half of millennial churchgoers think that it's wrong to evangelize.

[9:57] The trouble is, when we think about the other ways that we try to be right with God outside of Christ, the trouble is that, as the Scriptures tell us, we are dead in trespasses and sins.

We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But that God, in His goodness, gave His only Son to live the perfect life we failed to live, to die the death that we deserve in our place, so that through faith in Christ we have forgiveness and eternal life.

And that is something that our religiosity or our sincerity could never accomplish. See, the thing is this.

God did not have to give us His Son so that we could be saved through Him, but He did because He loves us. And so we should be motivated to share that good news with others so that they may be saved too.

This is good news about a loving God. We see some important lessons for how we go about doing that, how we go about sharing our faith in Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson, where Jesus uses catching fish to illustrate the work of evangelism that His disciples are called to.

[11:14] Now the first point I want us to notice is that the catch, that huge catch, the harvest, is the work of God.

Now look with me in our Gospel text in chapter 5, starting in verse 4. And when Jesus had finished speaking, He said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking.

And they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. Notice Peter's response.

Hey, we've been fishing all night. We didn't catch anything. You know what makes the difference here? Jesus is with them and His power will accomplish what Jesus directed them to do.

[12:23] And so it is with evangelism. So it is with this task that every disciple of Jesus shares this task of catching people.

I think about how I became a disciple of Jesus. It was through my mother sharing the gospel with me, reading the scriptures with me throughout my childhood. And the word, the power of the gospel, accomplished my conversion through her, but ultimately by the working of the Holy Spirit. And that is how it is with everyone who is converted to Christ. We're not evangelizing on our own steam. It's the power of God that accomplishes conversion.

Now that He is willing to do it through us is amazing because He can do anything. And He chooses to use imperfect vessels to accomplish His will for the salvation of souls.

That is awesome. It's God's power that does the work of conversion. And that should be reassuring to us as we work to spread the gospel.

[13:33] It's the word of God and it is the power of God that does the work. We just share the message. And if we have shared the message, regardless of the results, we have successfully evangelized.

And that does not depend on how smart or how persuasive or how charismatic we are. Which brings me to my second point from our text.

God uses unworthy and incapable people to accomplish His purposes. While that should encourage us, it should also remind us that we are not off the hook.

Now look at what Peter says to Jesus. Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord. That's what Peter says right before Jesus calls him.

Peter was a sinful man just like the rest of us. But look at how Jesus responds to him. Do not be afraid. From now on, you will be catching men.

[14:42] Jesus says, don't be afraid. I know your weakness. And I still have a job for you. I think that's a reminder that we all need, isn't it?

Think about all of the people we see in the Scriptures who were called by God to bear witness to the truth. Think of the excuses they gave.

I don't speak well. I'm too young. I'm a sinner. On and on and on. And yet God says, yep, and I picked you for the job anyway.

It's a reminder that his strength is made perfect in weakness. Do you think that you're the wrong person for evangelism?

Do you think of yourself as weak or inarticulate or imperfect? If the answer is yes, that is great because you're precisely the kind of person that God uses.

[15:48] Because it is about his might and his glory and not our own. Now you might say, well, I don't know what to say to people.

God has heard that one before as well. What you say is the very simple and straightforward message of the Gospel.

Who Jesus is, what he's done, what it means for us, why it matters. Now if you can explain that and I am confident that you can, you can talk to people about Jesus.

Okay, you might ask, how does that happen in real life? Well, here is a real life example. Not too long ago, I was kind of casually hanging out with someone.

Someone who does not profess to be a Christian. Now I asked them about their experience with church and if they would consider themselves Christian. got a confirmation that not really was the answer.

[16 : 56] Now that led to them talking about how they respect all kinds of religions because most religions are about being a good person. Now here is how I responded.

I said, it's true that a number of ethical teachings are shared between religions, but I am a Christian rather than something else for a reason.

Christianity, at its core, isn't about being a good person. It is about God's love for those who aren't good people. I have sinned and fallen short of God's glory and Christianity teaches that God loves and saves people like me through the death of Christ on the cross for our sins.

And unlike any other religion, Christianity teaches that that is a gift that we receive through faith in Jesus.

And it's for those like myself who know that they have not been good people. Now I don't know what kind of impact this had on that person's life yet, but I can tell that they were thinking about it.

[18 : 05] I bring that example up because any of us could have had that conversation with someone. In that conversation, I didn't say anything that I didn't know before I went to seminary.

Didn't take a seminary degree to share the gospel. You could do it too. And you should. Because here's the question for each of us to ask ourselves as we examine our hearts.

Do I really want people to be saved? Do you want people to be saved? Alright, got a few yeses. We'll work with it.

Then we had better get serious about telling people about Jesus. It is not wrong to want to see people come to faith in Jesus.

It is not wrong to share your beliefs with other people in the hope that they would leave their false religion to come to Christ. If we really believe, as our Bible says, that there is no other name but the name of Jesus by which we must be saved, then talking to someone about Jesus is the most loving thing you could possibly do for them.

[19 : 22] God's work to be saved. This work of evangelism, this work of sharing the gospel, of catching people, is a non-negotiable part of the Christian life.

Notice how when Jesus calls Peter, he gives him the charge about catching people, and Peter leaves everything to follow him.

Discipleship and evangelism go hand in hand. It's a topic in this sermon series because it is one of the essential responsibilities that we share as Christians.

in our culture most neglect. Evangelism is simple.

Our side of it is anyway. You can do it. It does not depend on your power. You can talk about Jesus. I know that you can.

[20 : 39] Do you want to see people saved? Do you want to see lives transformed, to see our community transformed? Do you? Alright, we got a few yeses. We'll work on it.

If your answer is yes, then let's get out there and start talking about Jesus with those who are lost. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.