

The importance of evangelism

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[0 : 00] This morning is from Romans, chapter 13, reading verses 8 to 14. Romans 13, 8 to 14.

Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. For he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

The commandments, do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this understanding the present time.

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because your salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over. The day is almost here.

[1 : 11] So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness and in sexual immorality or debauchery, not in dissensions and jealousy.

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Amen.

Have you ever said that? Have you ever heard that being said to you? Thank you.

Indeed we have. And we've often used it ourselves about different things. I can remember my mother, my father, saying to me, oh, it's not like it was when I was a wee boy.

I can remember saying that myself. In today's situation, looking back, it wasn't like this when I was young.

[2 : 27] Do you remember that? And those young people here, you'll see it. In 20 or 30 years, or even 10 years time, you'll turn to your mum and your dad, and you'll say, ugh, wasn't like that when I was young.

And we have to realise that as life changes and life moves on, God never changes. He's always the same. Yesterday, today, and forever.

And God wants us to be informed and challenged and move forward in his kingdom power. Gavin Reed, in his book, *The Gaggling of God*, talks about the crisis of a non-communicating church in a non-communicative society.

The gaggling of God. And we look about, as we look about our society today, we see many people trying to silence God or silence Christians.

It's not politically correct to say this or say that. So, God has done it. God has said, as he would say. Remember that phrase.

[3 : 53] God has done it. God has done it. And let us speak. But God says, go into all the world and share what I have shared with you, that power, that passion, proclaim it with love and with joy.

Politics are very corrupt. And we only have to look about ourselves, our world, to see that happening.

Irrespective of whether it's here, in Europe, or in America. You know, in the early 1700s or 1900s, Britain was one of the most, if not the most, missionary-sending countries.

And now in the 21st century, the statistics would show that only 2% of the population attend the church.

Church-going is a minority pursuit. And it's been overtaken in many people's lives by car washing and shopping and other sort of things.

[5 : 21] Church has taken a back seat for many families and many people. Why? Because I don't think the church speaks with the power and the passion that Christ wants us to speak with.

We don't communicate in a way that's understandable. We don't help people to know the love that God has for them in such a way that it's transforming their lives day by day.

The population of this country, Scotland, is 5.259 million people. And recent figures have shown that only about 390,000 people attended church.

What does that say to you? What does it say to me? And we have, I believe, in this day and age, an urgent call to evangelism.

Whatever that means for you, we need to evangelize our friends, our neighbors, our community. And we do that in a way that is comfortable to naturally show them God's love.

[6 : 51] Not to browbeat them, but in loving relationships, show them that God cares and God understands about their life and their position.

But of course, some would tell you the time's not right. Wait to a more opportune moment and then do this, evangelizing.

But that's not what the New Testament teaches us. In 2 Corinthians 6, verse 2, Paul says, I tell you, now is the time of God's favor.

Now is the time of salvation. And John, in his gospel, reminds us, I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields.

They are ripe for harvest. and Paul, in the reading that Richard brought to us this morning in Romans chapter 13, verse 11, do this because we live in an important time.

[8 : 09] It is now time for you to wake up from your sleep because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Do you believe that? We have to believe it because we are about an hour nearer the coming of the Lord now than we were when we came into this church this morning.

God is moving nearer and nearer to send the Lord Jesus Christ back to redeem his people. and we have a task that is yet unfinished.

What is the delay in evangelism? In 1955, Billy Graham was in fire for God.

Did any of you ever attend the Billy Graham campaigns? He was in fire for God. And even now when you see pictures of his campaigns and even as an old man in his 90s he still speaks with fire in his belly.

[9 : 26] The nation of John Knox, this nation who said give me Scotland or I die is now home to a growing number of unbelievers.

and in a few weeks time there will be coming to our city and other parts of Scotland celebration of hope where the Billy Graham team will come and present something to this nation and encourage it to be on fire for God.

oh how I desire that we as a people that we would understand what it means to be in fire for God. wouldn't it be good wouldn't it be great if we were all on fire not literally of course but if we allowed God to so pour his Holy Spirit upon us and tell men and women in a very natural way in a very loving way very kind way that God loves him.

The traveler on the road to Jericho did not rebuff the good Samaritan and neither should we.

[11 : 10] we no doubt have our opinions of people but are they our opinions or are they God's opinion?

When God speaks into your life about a man or the woman sitting at the side of Prince's Street begging whose thoughts are coming into your mind?

Is it yours or is it God's? How do you see them? What if one of those men or women were a replica of Jesus Christ and you passed him by?

What if he was incognito? Do we think he just had a person down on his luck or do we see him or her in the image of God?

God is at work in this world and he wants you to join him. And that assignment is called your mission and it's different from your ministry ministry.

[12 : 35] Because your ministry is your service to believers in the church, in the body of Christ, while your mission is your service to unbelievers in the world.

Which starts, if I may say so, which starts as soon as you get up in the morning. Do you know that? That your mission to the world starts as soon as you take your head off the pillow. Because maybe coming to your door that day will be the postman or the milkman or the paperboy who don't know Christ.

And it's your mission to love them into the kingdom. Have you ever been on the other side of an evangelistic project?

Perhaps you've been answering your door and they're standing in front of you with the Jehovah's witnesses who wanted to tell you about their faith, who wanted to convert you to their way of belief, who wanted to tell you that they're right and everybody else is wrong.

[14 : 11] When Francis Schaeffer, the American evangelist, the 20th century, was asked how he would spend an hour with a non-Christian, he said this, I would listen for 55 minutes and then in the last five minutes I would have something to say.

Because listening to a person's mindset helps you understand where they're coming from and you then can formulate your answer from scripture to tell them the way to Christ.

Of course, some people think that the gospel is foolish. Paul tells us that. The cross, the preaching of Christ, the preaching of the cross and the proclamation of Christ crucified is foolish.

and we are called to be incarnate, not excarnate, in our evangelism.

We are called to be Jesus. We are called to slow down and practice listening. Have you ever been on a course at work?

[15 : 40] Listening skills. No? Well, that's okay.

It's imperative that we listen to what somebody is saying to us rather than browbeat them with what we have to say.

Because only by listening and hearing do we kind of understand where they're coming from. and then we can formulate our answer, our response to them.

you know, most conversations or both conversions are not the result of a single point-in-time conversion, but the culmination of a personal process.

people and you may be identified with that as you've traveled your Christian journey, as you've been told about Christ, maybe as a Sunday school kids, or told about Christ in your home, and gradually, gradually, gradually, you have learned new things about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 02] and sometime at some moment in your life, it suddenly struck you. What you had heard had been true all the time, and your major commitment.

that happened in a sense with someone I had been speaking with who came to our house, and who came to Lynn's house when the previous church, in the Bible studies, and wanted to listen, and wanted to read books, and wanted to understand, but hadn't made a commitment.

And when he came to our house, we did the same with him, and we offered him the book that we had in Bible study, the story. They wanted to read it, but still nothing happened, until a few days before he died, and I was speaking to him in hospital, and I said to him, what are you looking for?

He said to me this, I'm looking for peace, and how did you get peace? I get peace through redemption. He knew all that, but he had to come to a point in his life when he admitted it, and I said to him, John, God comes to us, but we have a response to make to that God who loves us, and the following day, so I'm told by family members who visited him, there was a tremendous peace in his life, and I believe, yes, in those last moments, he found his peace with God.

He had traveled a journey for a good bit of his life, hearing the message message, that God loved him, but he was so intellectually made, he wanted to analyze everything, and it was only in those moments, when he was faced with death, did he realize what he had been told was true, and that would be the same with people whom we meet, day by day in our walk of life, they might not believe, but if we keep loving them, showing them God's love, they will come to know him, yes, a personal journey includes doubt and reflection, includes gospel witnessing and showing people the love of

[20 : 20] God and his Holy Spirit, and we also talk about other types of growth, biological growth, growth, where young people are brought up in the church, and through the organizations they go to, they come to faith, or transfer growth, where people come to the church, moving from a different area, and they start attending, and the church grows, but should the church or should we be content with the church growing numerically, or should we be more content with the church growing spiritually, that's a question we have to ask ourselves, do you want numbers, do you want seats and bottoms and seats, or do you want Christ in hearts, do you want to ask us, and that should motivate us and inspire us to do something about that,

God is in our community, do you know that, tells us that, in Genesis chapter 1, and verse 1, that the spirit, as we sang earlier on, cover the sea, and it wasn't just the Garden of Eden, God created the world, the spirit was allowed to roll over that world, God was in the community from the beginning, and he's in the community today, he's in your community, whatever your community is, whether it's

church, whether it's an organization, a bowling club, or a tennis club, or whatever, God is there, why?

Because you are there, and you've been commissioned to share in that community, God's love, and I have to say, that sometimes we do it very badly, we only realize later on, I should have said something to that person, that question they asked me, was the introduction point, that they gave me, to tell them something about Jesus, you see, Christ's incarnation, means that we become what he will have us be, so we are living out the gospel, as our lives are touching other people, even in church, the people you have conversation with, in this building, you touch their lives with your conversation with Christ, the people in your community, you touch their lives with your behavior and your lifestyle, and God will bless you for that, we are transformed, by being rooted in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, as he takes us, we take him with us to others, there's a hymn we have sung in the past, take the name of Jesus with you, remember it, take the name of Jesus with you, as I walk down the street today, and tomorrow, and this week, I'm taking Christ with me, but what impression do those who I'm speaking to have of Jesus?

us. We need to ask that God would fill us and empower us and make us to be what he would want us to be.

[25 : 19] You know, in every street, the church is surrounded by people who urgently need to hear the good news. It's not an option, and however we decide to communicate that gospel, we do it with God's approval.

Many people are subjected to propaganda today, to degrading influences, as they seek for fulfillment.

Many are aware of the foundations of society cracking beneath their feet with no hope for the future. The society is cracking up, and dare I say it, you only have to think of the American President, Trump, versus North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-un, who are at loggerheads with each other, who are people asking the question, will he or won't he?

Press the button, and the world sits not knowing, waiting and wondering what's next, and as they sit and wait and wonder, the church sometimes sits and waits and wonders too, but God calls us to go into the marketplace, to go into the lives of people who meet day by day, and share with them Jesus.

Remember a few weeks ago, Stuart Lee spoke at our harvest service, and he used this word, this phrase, foundation for farming.

[27 : 39] And I want to take that phrase and use it, not just to teach people how to farm, but to use it as a catalyst for evangelism.

We are all farmers, will you like it or not? to go into all the world and farm for people. Foundation for farming.

What's our foundation for bringing people to Christ? Is it the cafe, and that's all it is? Not everybody comes to the cafe from this area.

Maybe we hope that those who come will find Christ and then they'll go and tell other people, but that's not enough. because not every who comes to the cafe come from where you stay.

And therefore, you're God's ambassador. I am God's ambassador to my neighbors and my friends, and sometimes I am a very poor replica of God's love.

[28 : 58] evangelism has been said, is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

And it's not about finding bread at the cafe. It's telling people how to find that bread that will sustain them through all their life, every day.

how you will find that today, not tomorrow, because none of us know what tomorrow will bring.

You see, Jesus came not to give an example of a good life that men could try and imitate.

He came simply not to give good advice because the world is full of good advice or so-called good advice. And if you think of your own life, you can recall times in your life when you think you gave good advice to people, don't you?

[30 : 20] Don't say no now. go to the world. If the church is content to delay and leave people without the impact of the gospel, the devil is not.

He is constantly wiring his way into people's lives. David Livingston, that pioneer missionary from Blantyre, was moved by the words of his father-in-law, Robert Moffat, who said, I have often stood and watched the smoke rise from a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been.

And Livingston pledged himself to take the gospel. gospel is not only needed in Africa, but here in Western Hills or wherever you stay.

That Christ may shine. That's what we were singing this morning, wasn't it? This little light of mine. Did you enjoy it? Well, those who enjoy it will come to sing it next week. This little light of mine. And we let it shine. All the time, every day, even when we're feeling low, when things are not going as well for us as we want them to, we have to let Jesus shine.

[32 : 05] The cross is a death grapple with the powers of darkness. The victory of the resurrection means life to a world in the midst of death.

And you know, the statistics tell us that one out of one people die. We're past statistics. One out of one people die. and we have to be ready before God calls us home to be valuable for him.

It's not so much how we communicate that fact which is important. Some would say we live in a dark world but God as we've said this morning already is in our community and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters everywhere.

He is the light of the world in our lives, in our homes, in our community. And John reminds us that darkness cannot overpower it.

[33 : 45] Darkness cannot put that light out. It cannot be extinguished. But in a sense, unfortunately, we sometimes, our lives put that on a dim light.

Indeed, a previous moderator of the Church of Scotland has remarked this. We as a denomination could easily be sleepwalking into oblivion.

A great cultural tsunami has turned the social and spiritual landscape of the Church life, certainly in the Western world, on its edge.

We could be sleepwalking into oblivion. Would you say that about your church or your denomination?

salvation? You see, when those first disciples burst out from the upper room into the marketplace of Jerusalem, their mission wasn't to give good advice.

[35 : 14] It was to share a transformation that would change a person's life. It was a campaign which would eventually take them to the lines in the Roman arena.

Nothing could silence them. I wonder and I've often asked myself the question, what are the lines in our arena today?

In this country, in this society, in this community, what are the lines that you have to face? And do you face them head on, with no worry, because God's with you?

The gospel should not be proclaimed or shared at leisure. There's an inner urgency. should propel us to speak.

You know, it's very neat and tidy in a graveyard, but messy in the church. What's your preference for church, where things are neat and tidy, or where there's life and vibrancy, desire to learn and to grow.

[36 : 56] When Jesus passed by and saw Zacchaeus that day up a tree, he said to him, today, I must stay at your house.

Now, it might not have been convenient for Zacchaeus to have had Jesus in his house that day, maybe he had other appointments to go to. Maybe a later time would be more appropriate to come and see me.

Maybe his house wasn't quite clean enough to let Jesus come in, but Jesus said to him, today, today, because Jesus might not have come that way again, and he wouldn't have an opportunity. to speak to Zacchaeus. We cannot, let me underline this, we cannot discount the possibility of a Christian revival.

Let me say it again, we cannot discount the possibility of a Christian revival. at present, Christianity is not dying.

[38 : 21] It will never die while Christ is the head of the church, but it is sleeping. And evangelism, empowered by the spirit, like those disciples in the upper room, can transform it.

are you willing to be part of the organization that will transform the society today? Procrastination, with procrastination we are better prepared, but procrastination is the thief of time.

the more delay, the more inclination. You know, I read somewhere that the greatest argument for putting off anything in the church is to form a committee.

Well, let's just get a wee committee together. We'll think about it and discuss it. And that committee decides to have a sub-committee. God is going to break this city by prayer, nothing else. And he wants each and every one of us to be part of that prayer chain, to be a prayer warrior for him.

[40 : 05] Those disciples in going out, they received power. The story is told of a professional singer asked to take part in a wedding in America, which was followed by a reception.

and both she and her husband were excited at being asked to go to this very prestigious wedding. And after the wedding, the bride and the groom were followed by their gifts, by their guests, up the different staircase.

And at the top of the stairs, they were met by the manager for the town, who said to them, may I have your names, please? She said, I am Ruthanna Metzger, and this is my husband, Roy. He searched his list, but couldn't find the names. And he said to him, will you spell your name, please? So she did so. Again, he looked down the list, and he said, I'm sorry, your names are not here.

She responded by saying, you must be a mistake. I'm the singer. And I'm entitled to be here. He said, I'm sorry, but your name's not here.

[41 : 34] So he called the headwater over and said, escort this couple to the car. It doesn't matter who you are or what you did.

Without your name, in the book, you cannot enter the banquet. And as they were shown past all the guests, passing these lovely tables filled with exquisite food, and the orchestra practicing to start playing at the wedding, the wife broke down, and her husband said to her, what's the problem?

She said, we got the invitation. I forgot about the RSVP. And I forgot to send it in.

God has given to us an RSVP. It's in that book. how would you react if into this church came as did on one case, not to this church, but to another church, they decided to go to church, this gay couple, and hold hands, and shock the members.

how would you have reacted, or how would you react, if some gay people came into this church, and tried to shock you?

[43 : 25] Well, in that church, they loved them. They loved them into the kingdom, and that's what we are called to do, to love people, not to be judgmental, but to love them into the kingdom.

in this society in which we live, the government are going down a road that will eventually get people to say whether they are gender neutral, not if they are male or female, and as a church, as a nomination, as a Christian community in this area, across this land, we need to take our stand, because we are reminded in Matthew chapter 14, I think it is, God said, Jesus said, male and female, made he them.

We cannot change that, even though other people want to change it, we cannot do it. And going back to that story, she realized that that woman had a taste of what it would be like for those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

I didn't respond to God's RSVP. The man traveling on the road to Jericho didn't rebuff the good Samaritan, neither should we.

We a young girl was once asked her pastor this, you know that stuff you said about Jesus coming to him just as you are and not needing to clean themselves up first.

[45 : 53] Is that actually true? you thought why would someone doubt me? Of course it is. She said well I always felt that way too.

I thought it was a bad person to be a Christian. Does that mean that I can become a Christian now? That question is asked of every one of us. Can I become a Christian now who's not made that profession of faith? You might tell your friends I go to church every Sunday, I help the organizations, I help the cafe, I help with this.

God says that's all very well but you've not responded to my invitation and the invitation is open to everybody.

Now let's pray. Father God thank you that you give each and every one of us an invitation to come. May we not procrastinate but may we know this is the time not to sleep but to hear and to listen and to respond.

[47 : 19] In Jesus name. Amen.