

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

**PRAYER FOCUS: THE SECRET OF A FRUITFUL CHURCH**

Acts 4:23-31; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 9:35-38; John 15:5-8

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There are five points to today's sermon:

- Evangelism is the work of the church body.
- Evangelism is not confined to a building.
- Evangelism is based on a simple message.
- Evangelism takes work.
- The Fruit of Evangelism is not our responsibility.

**INTRODUCTION:** Our church has embarked upon a six-week prayer focus. This week, we are asking you to pray for evangelism effectiveness. The word evangelism comes from the Greek word which means “to proclaim the good news.” [euaggelizó (yoo-ang-ghel-id'-zo)] This word is used about 50 times in the New Testament and is most often translated “to preach the Good News” or “to preach the Gospel.” Unfortunately, because of that translation, many Christians believe that pastors, missionaries, and evangelists are primarily responsible for the work of evangelism. As we pray this week for evangelism effectiveness, I think it's important for us to take a look at what the Bible says about evangelism.

**1-EVANGELISM IS THE WORK OF THE CHURCH BODY**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 4:23-24, 27-31

*On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup> When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them... / <sup>27</sup> Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup> They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great*

*boldness.* <sup>30</sup> *Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*” <sup>31</sup> *After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

**EXPLANATION:** Peter and John were arrested for preaching the gospel. They appeared before the Sanhedrin who commanded them to stop preaching in Jesus’s name and released them. Upon their release, the two disciples returned to the group of believers who had no doubt been praying for them. I want us to examine closely the church’s prayer when they realized that Peter and John had been released. Did they pray for safety? Did they ask God to punish their persecutors? No, they asked God for great boldness to speak his word.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I think the reason most Christians do not think of themselves as evangelists is because they are intimidated. They do not believe they have the skill to speak about the gospel. They do not think they know enough about the Bible to be a witness. Evangelist Oswald Chambers once wrote, “When our Lord said to the disciples, ‘*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*’ (Matthew 4:19), His reference was not to the skilled angler, but to those who use the drag-net—something which requires practically no skill; the point being that you do not have to watch your ‘fish,’ but you have to do the simple thing and God will do the rest.”

**APPLICATION:** When the early church of Acts prayed for boldness, it was not a request for Peter and John. Peter and John had already displayed great boldness. It was a request for themselves and all Christians within this body. God answered the request and filled them with the Holy Spirit. He did not segregate the preachers, teachers, and missionaries for this gift. They were all filled, and they all spoke the word of God boldly. Evangelism should not intimidate us. If we ask God for boldness, he will answer that prayer.

- Evangelism is the work of the church body.

## **2-EVANGELISM IS NOT CONFINED TO A BUILDING**

**SCRIPTURE:** 1 Peter 3:15

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*

**EXPLANATION:** We tend to think of evangelism as something that an evangelist does in a week-long revival. There was a time when that was very popular and people packed out churches during revivals. It still happens in some cases. But times have changed, as you know, and it would be very difficult to pack out this church for a week-long revival. For the most part, I believe that day has passed.

If we think that evangelism is the world of evangelists, and if we think that the world of evangelism must happen during a week-long revival service, then it would be easy for us to think it's someone else's job to do the evangelism and plan the revivals. But nothing could be further from the truth. The scripture says we should be prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have.

**APPLICATION:** I'm not sure someone will walk up to you and say, "Tell me about the hope you have" because, at least in our culture that sounds a bit odd, but someone might say something similar. Several times in the last year, I've noted that people who did not know me told me the secret of their happiness. One woman told me it was her grandchildren. Another said it was his wife. I'm waiting for someone to say it's because they know Jesus Christ. So far, that's not happened.

**ILLUSTRATION:** I've told you a few times about an article that was in the Baptist Standard, the state paper for Baptists of Texas. It was about a man who said he believed his lifestyle alone would be a witness for the Lord. A man who knew him for many years said, "I've been wanting to ask you for many years. You seem different, you seem satisfied, and I've wondered why. Are you a vegetarian?"

**APPLICATION:** I believe that Christians must not only be ready to share the hope that we have in Christ, but we must be intentional about it as well.

Proclaiming the Good News does not require a seminary degree or a college education. Every Christian has a story - the story of how you have been redeemed.

- Who were you before you met Jesus?
- When and how did you meet Jesus?
- What has happened as a result of your salvation experience?

This is your testimony. While you may not have the opportunity to share your testimony in front of a large crowd, you will always have opportunities to share it with friends and family. The Bible says that we should live in such a way that

people know there is something different within us. Then, when they grow curious and ask, we should be ready to tell them the reason for our hope. This is proclaiming the Good News. This is the root of evangelism—what should be taking place every day in the lives of those who sit in our church pews.

- Evangelism is the work of the church body.
- Evangelism is not confined to a building.

### **3-EVANGELISM IS BASED ON A SIMPLE MESSAGE**

**SCRIPTURE:** 2 Corinthians 5:20

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

**EXPLANATION:** An ambassador is someone who serves as a representative. For an example, a US ambassador to France represents the interests of the United States to the French. He speaks on behalf of the United States government on French matters that might affect US citizens. The Bible says that we, as Christians, are Christ's ambassadors on this earth. We are called to speak on his behalf. This does not mean that it's your job to call out the sins of everyone else. It means that we should be concerned about what most concerns Christ, and what most concerns Christ is reconciliation with God. As followers of Christ, we are beneficiaries of God's love. He loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us. That is the message we are meant to share. That is the Good News, the gospel. We are separated from Christ because of sin. God made a way for us to be reconciled with him through the death of Jesus. God wants reconciliation.

**APPLICATION:** It's easy to complicate the Gospel. I've seen numerous evangelism strategies. I've been through two lengthy trainings myself. Two weeks ago, I found a certificate for one of those trainings I completed. For me, I've decided the way I first learned to share the Gospel of Jesus is the one I am going stick with.

1. We are all sinners (Rom. 3:10, 23).
2. The wages of our sins is death (Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus paid our sin debt on the cross (Rom. 5:8).
4. Salvation comes by faith, that is, by confessing with our mouths and believing in our hearts (Rom. 10:9,10).

5. Call on the Lord for salvation and get saved (Rom. 10:13).

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#### **4-EVANGELISM TAKES WORK**

**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 9:35-38

*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. <sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. <sup>38</sup> Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”*

**EXPLANATION:** Evangelism is not a one and done deal. It’s not a big love offering once or twice a year. It’s not simply sending missionaries overseas and praying they find success. Jesus said the harvest is plentiful. There is a harvest of souls who need to hear the gospel—on foreign soil, on American soil, in Nashville, in this church, in your home and workplace and backyard. Evangelism begins with how we live our lives and is rooted in being ready to share our testimony, but it goes beyond that. Proclaiming the Good News means that we have to be intentional.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney said, “It is the great business of every Christian to save souls.” I would rephrase that to say, “It is the great business of every Christian to do everything possible to see that souls are saved.” We cannot save people in and of ourselves, but as Christians, we have an obligation to tell people about Christ. This is not up for debate. We cannot choose to sit on the bench. This is the primary work of a Christian—to tell others about Christ.

**APPLICATION:** We need to look for opportunities to speak truth and share the message of reconciliation with those who need to hear it. To do this may require an organized mission effort, or it may be you taking a friend out to lunch and having a candid conversation with him about his spiritual life. It may be accomplished through teaching a Sunday school class, or it may be carried out as you give someone a ride in your car.

The work of evangelism is hard work, not manipulation. I've heard of numerous instances where someone dressed as a clown talked about heaven and manipulated children into praying a prayer they didn't understand and then baptizing all the kids.

I've sat through services where I thought the speaker was pushing too hard to get a response during the invitation. You know I could do that, I could go through the whole hand-raising deal, I could go through all of this "are you really, really sure" and all that, but I don't do it. The reason: our church rolls are packed with people who walked an aisle in the 1970s or 80s because they were manipulated or coerced by others.

A friend of mine who has passed on told me when someone in his church said they wanted to be saved, he would say, "Why?" and then he would say, "Are you sure?" In other words, they had to convince him.

During the altar calls at this church, we sing two verses. Occasionally we sing three but not often. The reason I move quickly is because if someone wants to be a follower of Jesus, they need to be ready to move. If they are hesitant, then maybe they aren't sincere. I'd rather have a few baptisms of people who are sincere, than a hundred baptisms of people who have no idea what they are doing.

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## **5-THE FRUIT OF EVANGELISM IS NOT OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

**SCRIPTURE:** John 15:5-8

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

**EXPLANATION:** No matter what we do, if we do it in and of ourselves, it will never be successful. A branch, cut away from the grape vine, will never produce grapes. Jesus is the source of everything good in our lives. Jesus is the one who gives us life and equips us to evangelize on his behalf. Our job is to proclaim the gospel, but our job is not and cannot be to force people into salvation.

Let me also add that while we must provide discipleship opportunities for those who are saved, we are not responsible if they choose not to follow through.

**ILLUSTRATION:** One writer said, “God will save whomever He chooses to save. The Christian should proselytize not because he thinks he can change everybody; he should proselytize because the Gospel being shared is the ultimate act of love: because he thinks he can love everybody.” We do not decide who deserves to hear the gospel. We should not share the gospel only with folks we think will respond positively to it. Nor should we share the gospel in order to make ourselves look like a better Christian. We share the gospel as an act of obedience to Christ and because of our love for him and for each other.

**APPLICATION:** We share the Good News. The rest is up to the Holy Spirit. He is the one who works inside individuals to bring them to Christ. Jesus gives each person the freedom to choose to accept or reject him. While we must be obedient to the call and faithful to the message, we cannot and should not try to accept responsibility for those who reject it or get personal credit for those who accept it.

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**INVITATION:** What is the secret to a fruitful church? It’s a congregation that goes into the world and tells people about Jesus Christ. This week, as you pray for evangelism effectiveness, remember that evangelism starts with you and me and each person in this room. All believers need to be ready to share that Jesus is the only way to God and that we come to him through repentance and by putting our trust in him.

It is our obligation and privilege as followers of Christ to share the Good News with our friends, our families, and strangers.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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