

The Greatest Evangelist

Text: John 16:5-15

[For the communicator] For this particular sermon I would delay reading the text so that tension might be built into the introduction.

In many congregations the word “evangelist” might meet with some suspicion. Minds might reflect on the well-known scandals of a few television evangelists. When I first began to serve as a pastor in Dallas, Texas it was common to have spring or fall revivals. The idea was to reach new folks or to revitalize the congregation. Generally in small churches a guest pastor known to be a good preacher would come for a week or so to preach evangelistically. The inference was that a full time evangelist would either be too expensive or would be an unsettling agent in the church. Later in my pastoral work I witnessed the healthy results of the career evangelist. I wonder if the church today is much affected by Paul’s affirmation of the role of the evangelist. He wrote in Ephesians 4:11 that Jesus “gave some to be evangelists.” Among the heroes of church history some were dynamic evangelists. Let me identify a few:

- George Whitefield—I’m always amazed at the descriptions given to his preaching and the influence of his ministry. Benjamin Franklin was deeply affected by Whitefield’s sermons. As far as I know Mr. Franklin was far from being a deeply committed Christian, but he was lavish in his description of Whitefield’s persuasive power. Here is one such compliment: “It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants; from being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seem’d as if all the world were growing religious; so that one could not walk thro’ the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.”

On another occasion he spoke about his disagreement with Whitefield who wanted to build an orphanage in Georgia for the many poor children that were without housing or family. The evangelist wanted to raise money in Philadelphia and other cities for that purpose. Franklin argued that it should be built in Philadelphia where most of the money would be raised. Even with that disagreement Franklin wrote, “ I happened to attend one of his sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish

with a collection, and silently resolved that he would get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and fives pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers, another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver, and he finished so admirably, that I emptied my pockets wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.

- In the mid 1800's another outstanding evangelist was given to the church, his name was Charles Grandison Finney. During a service in which he was preaching a man had brought a pistol to church with the intent of killing Finney. The man tumbled from his seat crying, "I am sinking into hell!" In Rochester, New York, nearly the entire bar [trade] of the city was converted. After hearing Finney a young and prosperous distiller in Auburn went to his warehouse, broke open the casks, and let the liquor flow into the streets.

Finney accepted the position of Professor of Theology at Oberlin College with the condition that they accept both white and black students. During his life he served as a revivalist, a teacher, a lawyer, a pastor, a theology professor, and college president. All of this is even more impressive when it is understood that Finney had no earned degrees and was basically self-educated.

- Sam Jones of Georgia was maybe one of the best known Methodist evangelist. He was a noted lawyer with unlimited potential, but drinking brought him down to the point that he lost family, finances, law firm and respect. But God touched him and he preached in great arenas to thousands. The Ryman Auditorium in Nashville was built so that he could speak there anytime he chose.
- In the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of San Francisco under the leadership of Dr. Lewis Julinel, the noted evangelist, Gypsy Smith, spoke. Sometimes he is remembered for an event that occurred when he was in his eighties. He married a woman in her twenties. He was asked if this was not a bit risky as far as health was concerned. He responded that she seemed to be strong and that he thought she was up to it.
- The names of Dwight L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, Peter Cartwright, Billy Sunday and others can be researched for rich insight into

their evangelistic efforts. I have been privileged to hear some of the well know evangelists of the twentieth century. John Linton of Canada, Luis Palau, Mordeciah Ham, an independent Baptist evangelist (I was only seven years old, but I was very attentive) I believe it was under his preaching that Billy Graham was converted. Hyman Appleman came to Dallas Seminary when I was a student. There was an adversarial mood in the audience as he was announced, but within minutes he had drawn their hearts to him. Often in college I heard Dr. Bob Jones, Sn. And of course I have heard Dr. Billy Graham. These were anointed heralds of the gospel and should be affirmed by the church, **BUT THEY DO NOT COMPARE TO THE GREATEST OF ALL EVANGELIST—**

THE BLESSED PERSON KNOWN AS THE HOLY SPIRIT. Then turn to the text and read it. John 16:5-16

Sadly, some of the well-known evangelists have fallen and brought great reproach on the name of Jesus, but this greatest of all evangelists is free from fault or any moral failure. Rest assured that the Holy Spirit is a power of which we want to be endued, but the Holy Spirit is a person whose influence brings multitudes to genuine salvation.

Dr. Bernard Ramm called the Holy Spirit the only Sapper. By using that term he was using a military analogy. To sap (verb) not sap from a tree, is the idea. It was the activity to dig a trench which zigzags back and forth so that soldiers can advance to an enemy stronghold. A sapper is the soldier who does the digging, but is generally used for the demolition crews who blow up bridges and military installations. The Holy Spirit using the Holy Word to penetrate the most mystifying part of a person, i.e., the heart.

For the communicator read verses that fit this military motif. II Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 2:1-3, and II Corinthians 4:4

“Who then could be saved?” the disciples asked Jesus. His response was, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” God, the Holy Spirit

Certainly there are means through which the Holy Spirit can move: Human witnesses such as preachers, Drama, Media, Tracts,

Archeology, Testimonies But any and all instruments are impotent without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 6:10 and 10:43-44

Martin Luther wrote: "I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him; but the Holy Ghost has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me in true faith; just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth."

To this John Calvin agreed. He wrote: "...the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of Himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find experience in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit."

The communicator should make as part of the message the three vital areas of the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit outlined in John 16. What the conviction of sin is, v. 9 Remember a person can reform or clean up his/her act, but that is not the essential sin that separates one from God, That sin is unbelief in Jesus. See John 3:18-21

What is righteousness? v. 10 Often we think in terms of acts of right and wrong behavior, but we must realize that the righteousness most needed is that which is of Christ, His righteousness is the only acceptable kind. See Philippians 3:9

What is the judgment? v.11 Many believe that nothing is being done to hold people accountable. But Jesus said, "The ruler of evil has been judged." See also 12:31 When Jesus returns the Devil will receive the sentence and all who are his captives.

Closing note: If I desire to preach evangelistically, it seems that the three above elements must be given in order to be in tune to the message the Holy Spirit addresses.