

## Sermon Series: Spurred on to Holiness (and Power) by Immersing Ourselves into the Life of Christ Through the Eyes of the Apostles – A Harmony of All Four Gospels

Sermon Title: The Work of Evangelism is 99.9% God and .01% Ours.

September 15, 2019

Today's Scripture: See insert

Series Theme verse: Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (ESV)

Introduction: Imagine you are one of the disciples on the hillside in Galilee after Jesus' resurrection. You are thrilled to see him alive but all of a sudden you hear his final command. "Go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and I will be with you always even to the end of the age." You look around and count. "Let's see, there are 11 of us. Used to be 12. He's expecting the 11 of us to carry the torch of Christianity so that the entire world will eventually hear the gospel message? Who is he kidding? Will he ask me to take Northern Europe? Will Peter be assigned to southern Europe? Who's going to Africa? I wonder who he will assign to the Far East? This is crazy. No one really expects the 11 of us to carry out this assignment, not really. I'm thoroughly discouraged before I even start. Why did I sign up for this? Jesus knew this sounded impossible. That is why he gave them these three parables earlier in their instruction.

Main point: We are not to fret about the size of the task nor about evangelistic results nor are we to be discouraged when those results are slow in coming.

Context:

Exegesis:

1. The Kingdom of God is made up of born again people. *"So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should scatter the seed on the soil, then should sleep and rise night and day; and the seed should sprout and grow up"*
  - The seed is the word of God – as in previous parables. However, through the power of the Holy Spirit that seed becomes a born again person.
2. The man scattering the seed is any witnessing and testifying believer. *as if a man should scatter the seed on the soil,*
  - In this case it is not Jesus who is scattering seed but individual believers, because Jesus says later that the man has no idea how the seed germinates. Yet Jesus does.
  - This is a command not a suggestion or optional duty. Every believer is to scatter the

seed of the gospel. Not just the 11 plus 1 disciples.

- *Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (ESV)*
- *1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (ESV)* Were the 12 disciples a chosen nation or every believer together with all others?
- Some people claim only those with the gift of evangelism are required to evangelize! That makes as much sense as only those with the gift of generosity are required to tithe. Plus there is no such thing as a gift of evangelism.
- But I have to ask, “Why is there a hesitation to witness?” If you love Jesus, then you will obey His command and if you love people you will want them to know Jesus too. So really, why is it most Christians don’t witness. National statistics say only 2% do 98 % don’t.

3. The soil has to be the Holy Spirit. *(he knows not how, for the soil itself brings forth a crop,*

- *John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: (ESV)*
- *1 Thessalonians 1:5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. (ESV)*

4. Conversion is a process that takes time. *first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear), and when the crop is ripe, he once puts forth the sickle, because the harvest time has come.”*

- Nicodemus didn’t pray a prayer to surrender to Jesus in John 3. It took the Holy Spirit a while to bring him to conviction.
- The process includes first hearing (sometimes in bits and pieces) the gospel message, then absorbing it over time, then finally coming to a point of conviction and repentance. Many of you can testify to that process in your own life.
- This is why I still don’t trust evangelistic events that try to make everything happen all at once. Statistics show those initial results don’t last. Perhaps what we are seeing is the same as the seed sown in the weeds or rocky ground.
- Saul’s conversion process started with the stoning of Stephen and the faith of believers whom he arrested. The harvest happened when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.
- This is what Jesus was saying in John 4:36 Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. (ESV)
- In John 4 the woman at the well in Sychar went through the process as well but Jesus was able to drill down into her specific sins. She is possibly an exception, but still she had to go through the whole process starting with the facts of who Christ is.

5. The Kingdom of God on earth had small beginnings but grew to include and provide a shelter for every tribe on earth.

- The disciples, like their Jewish brothers imagined that the Kingdom of God would be heralded with great fanfare and pomp. Jesus had to correct that misconception by instructing them that the inception would be nearly invisible and unnoticed.
  - The disciples could not foresee how their small number could possibly reach the world for Christ. This is the purpose behind the parable – encouragement. (Oh how we need that today)
  - The mustard seed is not the smallest seed God created but it is the smallest one they were familiar with when planting. Mustard plants grew in size from that tiny seed to a plant that 20 by 20 and some as high as 30 by 30.
  - The illustration of branches and birds has its link to OT illustrations of nations and kingdoms and people groups.
    - *Babylon Daniel 4:12 Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. (ESV)*
    - *Daniel 4:22 it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth. (ESV)*
    - *Of Assyria and its kingdom Ezekiel 31:6 All the birds of the heavens made their nests in its boughs; under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth to their young, and under its shadow lived all great nations. (ESV)*
    - *Of Jesus and His Kingdom - - Ezekiel 17:22–24 Thus says the Lord GOD: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. [23] On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. [24] And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.” (ESV)*
  - If the disciples were hearing with insight, they would have known these illustrations included all nations not just Jews, something Peter had to come to terms with in Acts 10 when he was called to witness to Cornelius.
6. The parable of the leaven teaches that the gospel’s small beginnings in a nation or culture will eventually impact the whole society.
- The pinch of yeast eventually touched every part of that 50 pounds of flour so that the bread was raised through the power of that fungus creating carbon dioxide gas that made it rise.
  - So too, with the small group of disciples, they changed the world.
  - Missiologist Ralph Winters has stated in 1430 Christianity comprised 1% of the world’s population. By 1993 it was 10%. It is now growing at a rate 3X faster than the rate of population growth.
  - Christianity, once it touches a culture permeates the entire world view of that culture. (See addendum)

- But in the microcosmic view, it does the same with every individual. Once the gospel enters the heart and conversion has taken place there is no stopping its effect. It will eventually transform the whole person. Paul says:
- *Romans 8:29–30 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (ESV)*

Application