

13. A Perpetual Ministry (2Q 2012—Evangelism and Witnessing)

Biblical material: John 4:7-30, Acts 2:42, 11:19-23, 2 Tim. 2:1-7, 2 Cor. 5:18-20, Luke 13:18, 19.

Quotes

- The driving force of the early Christian mission was not propaganda of beautiful ideals of the brotherhood of man. It was proclamation of the mighty acts of God. *James S. Stewart*
- The gospel is nothing but a frozen asset unless it is communicated. *J. B. Phillips*
- Vision is not enough, or even resolution; it is action that is required in the work of evangelism. *W.T.H. Richards*
- A child of God should be a visible beatitude for joy and happiness, and a living doxology for gratitude and adoration. *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*
- Salt seasons, purifies, preserves. But somebody ought to remind us that salt also irritates. Real living Christianity rubs this world the wrong way. *Vance Havner*
- The Christian religion, though scattered and abroad will in the end gather itself together at the foot of the cross. *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Questions

If evangelism is a perpetual ministry, does that mean we shall go on doing evangelism in heaven? How do we explain what this might mean? What is the final result of evangelism? Is evangelism about us, or about God? How does God bring things to a conclusion?

Bible summary

The story of the woman at the well gives us a case study of how to reach others. Jesus got the woman's attention and interest, intrigued her with his statements, convinced her that he did indeed have the truth, and that she could trust in him for her eternal salvation (John 4:7-30).

The early church community committed themselves to prayer and witness (Acts 2:42), and after the persecution shared their message with the Greeks too (Acts 11:19). Paul's instructions to Timothy are still valid today (2 Tim. 2:1-7).

God has given us this message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). The message is like a tiny mustard seed that grows to fill the whole earth, says Jesus (Luke 13:18,10).

Comment

We usually think of evangelism as trying "to win souls for Christ"—which would not be a perpetual ministry. But if it is speaking well of God, then certainly this *does* last forever. We are a continuing spectacle to the universe, to angels and to men. We are witnesses for God.

Remember how God pointed to Job as proof of God's true character, and how the Devil tried to change all that. Remember all the other witnesses for God that are recorded for us in the Bible. How they lived, how they failed too, but ultimately how they demonstrated the true character of God in their life and actions.

The record in Hebrews 11 of the men and women of faith does not describe people without failings. They failed God at times. Remember Noah and his drunkenness after the Flood. Think of Joseph, called the Supplanter. Moses the murderer. David the murderer and adulterer, who was called “a man after God’s own heart”.

They are the demonstrators. These are the people referred to in Hebrews 12:1-3. They are a great cloud of witnesses who demonstrate the truth about God. Not in their failings, but in their ultimate trust in God that led Noah to build the Ark, Joseph to care for his brothers in the famine, Moses to lead God’s people out of Egypt, David to be the King, and psalm-writer and so on.

That is why they are our examples. They tell us to do something other than look to them. They all say, “Look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” What is faith? Trusting God. Why do we trust God? Because of what he has shown to us in the person of Jesus Christ: “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame.”

Jesus is the spectacle. Remember what happened at the Cross. How Jesus became the object of gross indignity, the butt of crude jokes: someone to be sneered at, derided, ridiculed. Read Matthew 27:39-44. “He saved others, himself he cannot save. If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross.” What would you call such an event?

Jesus was made a public spectacle, exposed to public examination in the most painful way. On that cruel cross Jesus fulfilled his role of witnessing so completely about God. As it says in John 1:18, Jesus made God known. His mission reached its climax on the Cross—for there before all the people, the Son of God gave his life as a witness.

What had Jesus said? “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.” What did he mean? That by publicly demonstrating God and his love to all—men, angels, everyone—he would complete his work of witnessing. He was the true and faithful witness. He showed God in a way no other could, because he was God.

The watchers. What did the watchers see? The centurion said “Surely he was the Son of God.” John said: “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” (John 1:14). That word “beheld” comes from the root word of *theatron*! We “theatered” his glory, says John. We are his witnesses.

John says again in 1 John 4:14: “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” Once again the words ‘have seen’ relate to the theater word!

Again John says: “For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness...” (1 John 1:2).

Jesus was the public demonstration of God. To use an old word, he was a gazingstock. So what of us? Hebrews 10:33: “Ye were made a gazingstock.” And yes, the word translated gazingstock is *theatrizomenoi*. A theater-like spectacle. A public and very valid demonstration.

Of what? That’s the real question today, isn’t it? What are we saying to the world? What are we telling the world in the way we live and act? What are we demonstrating?

We are His witnesses, so the Bible says. We demonstrate God to everyone—and not just those on this planet. What a responsibility! Makes you think, doesn’t it? We’re not acting. We must get people to see that. What we have to say and show is eternally important. We have to get the warning and the invitation across.

Isn't that the situation we face? We must convince people that what we say is vitally true. We're not actors, this is not the ultimate show of entertainment. So what are we saying? What should we say?

People went out to see John the Baptist (to behold him the record says—*theomai*, the theater word again! Luke 7:24). Jesus asked the people what they went to see. A reed shaken by the wind? No, John the Baptist was the Preparer of the Way, the forerunner of the coming Messiah.

That is our message. That must be our demonstration. That people can look at us, see Jesus and want to know him as a friend too.

We don't need to fear. But we do need to recognize that in our lives we either help or hinder the spreading of the truth about God. We either say the Devil is right, or God is right.

So let us be a true spectacle to the world of God's wonderful goodness and his incredible salvation, let us witness to the falsity of the Devil's claims, and let us testify to the trueness of the character of our loving Savior and tell the truth about God!

Ellen White Comments

You are a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. God's people should now receive the light and diffuse it. They need not try to shine; if their hearts are enlightened by Christ, they cannot help shining. The brightness will appear; every true disciple will reveal Christ to the world as the sin-pardoning Saviour. {FLB 304}

The Lord Jesus is making experiments on human hearts through the exhibition of His mercy and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions. They are to him an incomprehensible mystery. The angels of God, seraphim and cherubim, the powers commissioned to cooperate with human agencies, look on with astonishment and joy, that fallen men, once children of wrath, are through the training of Christ developing characters after the divine similitude, to be sons and daughters of God, to act an important part in the occupations and pleasure of heaven. {AG 222}

It is no time to be ashamed of our faith. We are a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. The whole universe is looking with inexpressible interest to see the closing work of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. At such a time as this, just as the great work of judging the living is to begin, shall we allow unsanctified ambition to take possession of the heart? What can be of any worth to us now, except to be found loyal and true to the God of heaven? What is there of any real value in this world, when we are on the very borders of the eternal world? {CE 212-3}

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love. {GC 678}