

Every Saint Sent

Objectives (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

¹And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³And he said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them." ⁶And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. (Luke 9:1–6)

A Quick Review

- A. This is now our third week on this text and hopefully by now at least a few things have been made clear:
1. We've seen that Jesus is ultimately raising up the church to carry on His mission in the world.
 2. And, therefore, we've come to understand that every saint is sent, that every Christian is a missionary of God.
 3. And, last time, we made note of one of the primary things we are being raised up and sent out to do: namely, "to proclaim the kingdom of God" (v. 2).
 - a. This idea of proclaiming the kingdom of God, "preaching the gospel" (v. 6), or sharing The Story (as we spoke of it last time), is what we pick up again now this morning.
- B. There was an observation I made last time that really sets up all that we will be discussing on this subject of evangelism. Let me restate it for you now:
1. Upon reading the Scriptures closely, it occurred to me that though Jesus and His apostles and disciples are always preaching the same gospel, they never preach it in the same way.
- C. Recall, as a quick reminder of this, the examples I gave from Jesus' ministry:
1. For the thirsty woman at the well, He is the giver of "living water" (John 4:10).
 2. For the hungry crowds in the wilderness, He is "the bread of life" (John 6:35).
 3. For the man born blind, He is "the light of the world" (John 9:5).
 4. To those in front of Lazarus' tomb, He is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

- D. In every case, He meets these people in their longings, in their brokenness, in their story and then, from there, backs into The Story.
 - 1. He doesn't have just one way of sharing the gospel. He doesn't have a mere script that He's memorized and recites. He tailors His message to His audience. He brings the truths of the gospel to bear on a human soul in a way that meets them, arrests them, seems compellingly relevant to what they are really facing in that very moment in time.
 - a. Again, though He is always preaching the same gospel, He never preaches it in exactly the same way!

A Way Forward

- A. And, if it is true, that we His people have been sent by Him and are, by His Spirit, carrying on His mission in the world, don't you think our own proclaiming, our own evangelism, our own sharing of The Story ought to look something like that?!
 - 1. I want us to have a way of evangelizing that scales, and flexes, and contextualizes to reach the very people in front of us. Like Jesus and His disciples, I want us to be a church that's always preaching the same gospel, but never in quite the same way.
- B. But how do we grow in this?
 - 1. I gave us three things that I think we need to know: (1) We need to Know The Story; (2) We need to Know How The Story Touches Our Own Story; and (3) We need to Know How The Story And Our Own Story Touch Their Story.

(1) Know The Story

- A. We covered the first last time, but since the next two are built on it, let me touch on it briefly. By "Know The Story" I mean we need to know The Story of the world as presented in the Scriptures. We need to know the only true Story—the only Story that can make sense of the disparate facts and experiences of life. We need to know the gospel.
- B. Last week, I broke The Story down for us into four chapters which we can summarize this way:
 - 1. Chapter 1: Creation—God made everything, and it was very good.
 - 2. Chapter 2: Fall—Man broke everything, and is responsible for bringing in the bad.
 - 3. Chapter 3: Redemption—Jesus saved everything, in His life, death, and resurrection.
 - 4. Chapter 4: Consummation—And soon He will totally restore everything, when He comes again in glory.
- C. Like a musician learning scales we learn this Story by heart, so that when we're on the "stage" of real life relationship and ministry we can play the right note, in the right key, at the right time.
 - 1. Because we know the whole Story by heart, we can tailor and contextualize it for the person we are speaking with in the moment so that the thirsty hear us talking of water, the hungry

hear us talking of bread, the blind hear us talking of light, and the dead hear us talking of life. And the gospel is shown to be as relevant as it truly is!

(2) Know How The Story Touches Our Own Story (Cont'd)

The Gospel Gap

- A. Now, I think that the next step when it comes to learning to share The Story in this sort of way for others, is actually first learning to do this for our ourselves—we need to Know How The Story Touches Our Own Story.
1. We should not expect that we can bring the gospel with relevance into the everyday stuff of another person's life if we can't even see how it's relevant to the everyday stuff of our own life.
- B. Paul Tripp and Tim Lane, in a book I highly recommend entitled *How People Change*, write of what they call "the gospel gap". They contend, and I think they are right, that for a lot of us, Christians, there is a massive gap in our understanding of the gospel.
1. We get that it has past realities, namely, that Jesus died once and for all for our sins and has been raised for our justification, and that because of these things we've been born again, saved, forgiven.
 2. We get that it has future realities, namely, that Jesus' work on the cross secured for us an eternity with Him in the new heavens and earth.
 - a. But, in between the past and future realities of the gospel, there often remains a massive gap in our understanding. The gospel is relevant with reference to the past, relevant with reference to the future, but utterly irrelevant to the stuff we face day in and day out—the stuff we're facing in this room right now.
- C. Now we probably would not say this so baldly, but functionally is this not the sort of thing our lives often betray?
1. What does our anxiety communicate? God is not here for us, God is not a Father, we are orphaned and on our own. Sure He may have gone to prepare a place for us, but He's gone, and we're on our own back here in the meantime.
 2. What does our anger communicate? God is not fair with us, God will not protect us. Even if He is coming to make all things right in the end, He's not coming soon enough. I've got to take vengeance into my own hands.
 3. What does our greed communicate? God is not enough for us. There may be treasure laid up for me in heaven, but He gives us very little to enjoy in the present. So I white knuckle what's mine.
 - a. We believe that Jesus died for us and saved us at some point in the past, and we believe that we will be with Him in heaven at some point in the future, but we have no idea how the gospel connects in any meaningful sort of way with our day to day.

- i. We believe The Story, but we come to find we are not truly living in it!
- D. Lane and Tripp write: “It is in the here and now that many of us experience a gospel blindness. . . . People need to see that the gospel belongs in their workplace, their kitchen, their school, their bedroom, their backyard, and their van. They need to see the way the gospel makes a connection between what they are doing and what God is doing. They need to understand that their life stories are being lived out within God’s larger story so that they can learn to live each day with a gospel mentality” (p. 4).

Answering Questions No One Is Asking

- A. With regard to the subject at hand, I would argue that such a gospel gap not only affects our own Christian lives, it also guts the very engine that should drive our evangelism.
 - 1. With this gap in place we will present to the world a past and future but presently irrelevant gospel. We won’t know how the gospel touches what they are really facing in the moment—the fears and longings, sorrows and joys.
 - a. We will talk about the gospel as if it is only relevant for the person’s afterlife when truly it holds out the offer of abundant life for them in the here and now.
- B. One popular evangelistic method I’m aware of actually encourages you to begin with the question: “Do you know for sure that you are going to be with God in heaven?”
 - 1. Certainly the question is well-intentioned. Certainly the question was at one point very pertinent and searching.
 - a. But, can I just say with all respect, to the secularized, modern man in the western world today, this question makes the gospel seem irrelevant to him right out of the gate. He doesn’t care about heaven . . . he doesn’t even believe in it!
- C. The Pew Research Center found that roughly 50% of the population in the San Francisco bay area actually believe in heaven. The others either don’t know or don’t care. We also find that roughly the same percentage of the population would consider themselves Christian—either Protestant or Catholic.
 - 1. And I think it’s safe to assume that the 50% who believe in heaven are probably the same 50% who consider themselves Christian.
 - a. Here’s the upshot of all this: The only people we can reach with that “evangelistic” question are people who have already been reached! The other 50% don’t believe in heaven and certainly don’t care about going there. They think it’s a joke. And if that’s all the gospel is good for, well, the gospel seems like a joke to them too.
- D. So much of our evangelism is an attempt to answer questions people aren’t even asking, to scratch where people aren’t even itching.

1. But do you realize that Jesus nowhere does such a thing. He doesn't say: "I know you don't care about this, but you really should." He always gets to the gospel through the very things that they care about. He always gets to the gospel by answering the very questions they are asking. He always meets them in their story and backs into The Story.

Closing the Gap

- A. Truly, the gospel speaks with profound relevance into the whole spectrum of human experience. It has something to say to us in our fears and in our longings, in our sorrows and in our joys. It meets us in our friendships and in our families, in our work and in our play, in our wins and in our losses, in our celebrations and in our sufferings, in our life and in our death.
 1. As Ben Connelly and Bob Roberts Jr. put it in their book *A Field Guide for Everyday Mission*: "[The gospel] is a past event, both historically and personally for every Christian. It does give future hope, for personal reconciliation and the renewal of all things. But it also impacts every moment of our present lives. The gospel means something, to everyone, every day, for every situation, whether they know it or not" (p. 199).
- B. We desperately need to close the gap for ourselves so that we can begin to learn how to close that gap for others.
 1. We want the gospel to be more than a few truths we've memorized or a few words we speak. We want it to be a world, a Story, we live in. Only then can we meaningfully invite others into it.

Living in The Story

- A. Can I encourage you to start making a regular habit of pausing in the midst of the everyday stuff of your life and ask: "Okay, now how does the gospel touch this moment? What does it look like to take what I'm facing right here in my story and back into The Story?"
 1. I think you'll be surprised how hard this is at first, and yet how enriching it is once your eyes start to open a bit.
 - a. Let me just give you just one example from my last week.
- B. Some of you heard in the announcements that, as a church, we are running a bit behind for the year financially. Now, I know that this can be common for churches coming into the last quarter, but such news can still be hard for me, the Lead Pastor, to face.
 1. The temptation might be to think: "God, where are You? Are You going to provide here? Am I a failure? Have You left me alone?"
- C. But, if we take that everyday moment of financial stress and job anxiety (that I'm sure many of you are no stranger to) and we bring it back into The Story . . . everything changes!
 1. God ministers to me: "O Nick, You were created for My glory but you rebelled against Me. And even though you deserved My wrath, I gave you My Son. And if I did not withhold my

only Son from you, how will I not also with Him freely give you all things (Rom 8:32)?! I will provide for you as a Father for His boy—both now, and in ways you cannot even imagine in the age to come. Don't fear. It's going to be okay."

- a. You just close the gap, and the peace of God floods into what could've been a moment of anxiety.
- D. Now don't you think a God like that is relevant for the financially pressed population of Silicon Valley, where so many are working scared? "Will I make this month's rent? Am I next on the chopping block for the budget cuts?"
1. As you sit across from a coworker at lunch and they share some of their anxieties, you can bring the gospel to bear on them right there in the everyday stuff of their life. You can meet them in their story and then back into The Story.

(3) Know How The Story And Our Own Story Touch Their Story

Increasing Awareness and Increasing Confidence

- A. Clearly now we've started to shift towards that third point: We need to Know How The Story and Our Own Story Touch Their Story.
1. As we become increasingly aware of the gospel's relevance to every moment of our lives, we also become increasingly confident that it can be brought with relevance into every moment of even an unbeliever's life.
- B. I wanted to end by sharing with you an example from Jeff Vanderstelt's book *Gospel Fluency*. I haven't read the book yet (I only received it yesterday), but I bought it on a hunch that his vision for evangelism is similar to what I'm aiming for here. And from what I can tell it is strikingly so!
1. I want to read to you a story of one of his evangelistic encounters. It's a bit lengthy but it truly embodies everything I've been trying to get across. Sit back, listen, and make note of how he meets this woman in her story and then brings her back into The Story.

"Whenever I am engaging in a conversation with someone, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me. He is called 'the Helper,' after all (John 14:26). 'Help me slow down,' I pray. 'Help me to trust you are working here in the silence. Help me to listen well—to them and to you.' . . . I ask him to give me ears to hear what the real issues are, and then provide me with wisdom as to how to share the truths of Jesus in such a way that they will be good news to the other person.

Recently, on a plane, I happened to sit next to a woman who was very troubled. I didn't know this at first because she looked and seemed pleasant in her greeting. . . . I asked the woman, 'So, are you leaving home or headed home?'

She replied: 'Well, both, I guess. I live in Seattle, but I'm flying to the place that was supposed to be my new home. My husband and boys are there now. It's a little complicated. . . . We couldn't all move at the same time because I had to stay back to work for a while longer in Seattle. However, now we're getting a divorce, so I will be staying in Seattle. I'm just going to see my sons and sign divorce papers and head back home.'

I asked what had happened and she continued to open up. I continued to pray and listen to both her and the Spirit . . . The story just poured out of her mouth. The dam had been ready to burst for some time.

I have found that when you make space for others, and they really believe you care, they are eager to open up and pour out their hearts. . . I'm increasingly convinced that people can sense something is different about us. So they are often more prone to share when they experience the Spirit's presence and his fruit in our lives.

The woman on the plane went on to describe how she had had an affair and how her husband, in his anger, had done everything he could to destroy her image on Facebook, turning all their friends against her. He had succeeded in turning her sons against her as well. She was terribly embarrassed, broken, and demoralized. I listened for quite some time, and it became clear to me that she was sorry for what she had done and regretted the pain and shame it had brought on her and her family. Not only did she feel bad, but she was being crushed by the weight of it. The guilt and the shame were too much to bear. And she was deeply burdened by her husband's anger and her sons' pain.

Listen for the longing, listen for the pain, listen for the need for Jesus.

She wanted to make things right. She wanted forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

Jesus had good news for her.

At one point, she stopped and said: 'You sure are nice. You've been listening to me go on and on about my life, and I've hardly asked you about yours. You're just so easy to talk to. Who are you?' She seemed surprised that a stranger would listen and show he cared.

I then explained to her who I was and, most importantly, who I knew. I let her know that I know and love Jesus, and that Jesus cared and was listening to her as well.

. . . I shared with the woman that she was feeling shame and guilt because of her sin and her subsequent attempts to deal with it. I shared with her the story of Adam and Eve, and how they tried to deal with their sin. I continued to show her how it led them to blame each other and brought destruction in their relationships.

'You and your husband both experientially know the pain of sin,' I said. 'And because sin is ultimately a violation against God, the giver of life, and his ways, which protect and promote life, you are both looking for someone to pay the penalty for that violation. The Bible calls this payment 'atonement.' We all know someone should pay for sin. So when we sin or are sinned against, we look for someone or something to atone for it. If we look to ourselves, we self-loathe and hate, which is shame and guilt having its way in us. If we look to blame others, we become bitter and hate them, wanting them to pay. In either case, the sin never really is dealt with. It doesn't go away. Instead, it produces more destruction. In many cases, we try to earn our own atonement by trying to be better, work harder, or promise never to do it again. But that leads to other forms of destruction, such as perfectionism, workaholism, manipulation, and pride, or devastation and depression when we fail.

'What you need,' I continued, 'is one who can truly atone for your sin. You need someone who can handle the weight of sin, forgive you of your sin, and set you free from it, so that it no longer defines you. You need Jesus.'

I then went on to describe how Jesus willingly went to the cross to take her sin on himself. I shared how he was willing to be publicly shamed for her so that she not only could be forgiven but also clothed in his righteousness and freed from guilt and shame.

'You will never be able to do enough to remove your guilt and cover your shame through your own efforts,' I said. 'Only Jesus can do that for you. And your husband hates you because he is also looking for atonement for your sin. That makes sense if he doesn't know Jesus. He doesn't have another place to go to. Until he meets Jesus, he will continue to expect you to pay for what you've done. And if you don't go to Jesus for forgiveness, you will keep carrying both the weight of your sin and your husband's hatred of you for it. . . Let Jesus take the guilt, the shame. And ask him to carry the weight of your

husband's hatred toward you. You can't handle it. But Jesus can and did at the cross. He died to remove it and to heal you of its scars.'

We went on and on about how the gospel brings forgiveness, healing, hope, and even love for those we've hurt or been hurt by.

At the end, she said: 'I feel like I got a free counseling session with God just now. I'm convinced he set up our seating arrangements for this flight.'

I agreed. He does that kind of thing.

He wants to do that through you as well, if you will set aside your self, your assumptions, and your need to be heard or be right, and just listen. Listen to the people God has put into your life and listen to what the Spirit has to say. Then you will know how to speak the gospel to the deep longings of people's souls.

Many are going to other wells to find water.

Let's be willing to slow down in order to lovingly show them how Jesus is standing ready to uniquely satisfy their thirst" (pp. 176-180).

C. However God leads us to go out from here and proclaim the kingdom—whether we are preaching on street corners, approaching strangers, or talking with old friends—may we do it all with a listening ear, with authentic curiosity and compassion for those we are speaking with, in hopes that we might identify their longings and fears and deep needs of their heart and bring Christ to them there!

1. May we always preach the same gospel but never in quite the same way!