

SESSION 7



TRUTH AND ERROR

Introduction

As Christians our desire, more than anything else, is to see people won for the Lord. To see God's kingdom expanded on this earth is our prayer. We pray and long for those who we love to come to know the Lord as their own personal Saviour. Yes, this is our utmost desire but it is important to recognise that, when it comes to winning souls, we need to leave that to the Maker. We are called to 'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel'. We are not told to 'Go into the world and save souls'. This is the work of someone much more powerful than us. As God's servants we have been entrusted with the proclamation of the Gospel. What an amazing privilege that God chooses to use us in the process of another coming to know Him.

We have already seen the importance of working with the correct definition of 'evangelism'. The devil exerts great cunning and stealth attack in us to thinking that evangelism is something that it isn't. Why does this happen so easily? It's because there is often a lot of *truth* mixed in with a small amount of *error*. 'Evangelism is the winning of souls.' This statement sounds very credible. But is it? Is this really the true definition of evangelism? What are the effects of Christians believing that this is the case?

Focus

Most people hate failure. We do anything to avoid it. Yet when we approach evangelism believing it to be the 'winning of souls', we set ourselves on a *pass* or *fail* endeavour. When people think they are going to fail they do one of two things. The first reaction is we give up. We avoid putting ourselves in a position where it is possible to fail. In this case, we don't share the Gospel because we don't believe (possibly based on past experience) that we are capable of persuading a person to give their life to Christ. We quit, so the Gospel goes unproclaimed.

The second reaction to the possibility of failure is that we preach a Gospel that is 'seeker friendly'. We may leave out the topic of judgement and Hell and just talk about the 'good stuff'. We may even preach falsehood such as, 'Come to God and your troubles will end', 'come to God, He'll make you rich', 'Come to God and life will be perfect.' So the Gospel is compromised because we want to make sure that we 'succeed' in evangelism. The desperate reality, however, is that people are reacting to something that isn't the truth. They are coming to God under false pretences and this has serious consequences.

This is the danger that arises when we think of evangelism as the winning of souls. Yet the Bible states that salvation belongs to the Lord. Whether in the Old Testament, where it refers to the salvation of the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 3:23), or in the New Testament and the redemptive act of Jesus Christ, we can only conclude that the work of Salvation is not ours. It is Christ's and His alone.

'From the Lord comes deliverance' Psalm 3:8 (NIV) or, as reported in the NKJV, 'Salvation belongs unto the Lord.'

Is there not immense relief and comfort in this? When it comes to people being saved from Hell to eternity in Heaven with the Father that work is all of God. We *cannot* save a soul. Our task is to communicate the message of Salvation to the unsaved and then pray that the Spirit of the Lord would convict them and draw them to commit their lives to Him. So it is impossible to fail in evangelism!

Once we see that evangelism is not the winning of souls but rather the pure and simple task of announcing and spreading the Gospel then we, as the body of Christ, can work together with the same vision, the same goal and desire to reach the whole of this world with the message of the Good News. It's a team effort and it needs all players on the pitch!

Discussion

1. What are the dangers of calling evangelism 'the winning of souls'?
2. The emphasis of this teaching has shown to us that only God can make things grow (1 Corinthians 3:6, 7). In light of this how do you interpret Proverbs 11:30 that says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise."
3. Is it wrong for us to want to win souls in our evangelism efforts?
4. How does it feel to know that our job is purely and simply 'to announce or spread the Gospel'?
5. Why is it important that there is unity of thought concerning evangelism?

Bible Parallel

Read Mark 4:3–20; Matthew 13:31–33

Both of these passages reveal to us that the growth of God's kingdom is gradual and mysterious. It doesn't occur all at once. It also is beyond our comprehension. Furthermore, these passages stress the divine power of the seed, i.e. the 'word of the kingdom'.

Jesus' emphasis here is particularly on the hearers in receiving the seed of the gospel. The seed is always good. Its growth however, is determined on the type of soil it falls on. In the same manner, the full experience and transforming impact of the Gospel is contingent on the receptivity of people's hearts to God. A genuinely attentive heart will determine whether the seed will have its desired fruit bearing effect in a person's life.

People respond differently depending on their readiness to receive the Gospel. Thus, it is not in our hands as 'sowers' to control the speed or determine God's timing for growth. God does not call us to be 'goal orientated' measuring how successful we are as sowers through the number of conversions. God only commands us to preach the Gospel to all nations. The *results* belong to Him alone. Our task is simply to scatter the seed and nourish it and reap the harvest. Growth is ultimately God's imperative.

Linked to this is the remarkable contrast Jesus draws in the image of a mustard seed – the smallest of all the seeds but in its final stages of growth producing a tree as large as 8–12 feet. In the light of the expansion of God's kingdom, do not despise the start of small beginnings for they have the potential to gradually turn into remarkable growth, becoming an avenue of mighty blessing. What may seem to be insignificant to our eyes now will reap significant abundance in time to come. Small becomes great when God is at work. So the kingdom of God may seem unimpressive at first, but appearances can be deceptive because no one can ignore it at the end. We must be patient and remember that, very often, human valuation ultimately misses the point!

Further discussion and personal contemplation

The Gospel changes everything. We can have real confidence in its power. Discuss what it means to be a 'sower' and what our expectations of this role should entail. Consider how this new mind-set enhances and influences our desire to witness to those around us.