

The fifth function of the church: Outreach and Evangelism

Mark 5:1-20

20082023 Curtis Davis

Greetings and Introductions

Over the last few weeks, we have been going through a series on the functions of the church.

We, the ecclesia, are a community baptised into one Spirit. We are called not *of* this world but *in* this world like travellers passing through. We have not been called out of this world, for our instruction is to seek the lost; to be a light in the dark; a city on a hill; proclaiming our Father's good grace and mercy to all who look upon his Son. By His Spirit, living waters flow from the lives of those who are his, preaching good tidings to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives and oppressed, and recovery of sight to the blind.

Today we will discuss the fifth function of the church – Outreach and Evangelism. We will explore the concept of bridging our context with the context of a lost and confused world.

Defining the word

What do you think of when I say evangelism and outreach?

How would you define it?

Do you jump to images of Street preaching? Handing out bible tracks in the city? Going door to door?

What does that word mean to you?

Angry people with signs on the road? Clammy hands? Awkward conversations?

Or do you see positive things like praying with people in public, people clothed and fed, people shedding tears touched by the lord?

Or maybe the thought brings to mind questions such as

“Do I know enough to evangelise?”

“What if I don't have the right answers?”

“What if I say something wrong?”

Can anyone empathise with this?

Personal assumptions

I understood evangelism as awkward conversations with strangers at the mall or supermarket. These often resulted in the stranger rejecting the message as we reject vacuum cleaner salesmen.

“Oh no, thank you, I don't need one” “I've already got one” “It's not for me.”

But that gets me thinking, does evangelism require us to sell Jesus to someone, like he's the new get-rich-quick method or the new health and wellness drink?

Because of this I've often wrestled with *what* evangelism is.

Personal difficulty

I'm the type of person that whenever he sees a Christian group in public ill, go over and see them. I'm always interested in what people are doing. But honestly, I've always found it uncomfortable doing those things alone. I find it very hard to approach strangers on buses or trains etc.

Good experience

We once had a home group at my house. It was cool because everyone knew they were there as part of a community rather than just attendees. What I mean is that some had in their heart to serve, cook, worship, pray etc. But one element we wanted was outreach. We wanted to invite people over to eat with us and learn from the word. We came across the idea that since we needed to get dinner supplies before our meeting, some of us would pray to the lord and say that we were available to meet whomever he wanted us to, and we would head out to the mall. The concept was to go out and tell people about Jesus and prepare a meal for anyone who would want to join. We found that not only did we start to learn how to share our faith, but the simple fact that we had our minds on evangelising began to impact the wider group too. We began to see that the whole group (even those who didn't feel like they were "evangelists") found themselves reaching out to people at work to try to invite them to our weekly dinners. This was a fantastic taste of what it means to partake in evangelism.

So in the wrestling, I've sung on the street; travelled around; painted houses; preached in the open and shared testimony in churches. I've seen small healings after my friends, and I have prayed for people and experienced baptisms in the ocean, rivers and bathtubs.

As I look at the experiences the Lord has brought me through, I've seen that my question has evolved from *How* to do evangelism and outreach to beginning to dwell upon the root of evangelism and outreach.

Culture is ever shifting, but God doesn't change. Our methods get old and outdated, but the spirit breathes fresh revelation into our circumstances as we walk with him.

Biblical Definition of Evangelism.

To do this, we must look at two words

1. The first is the root verb εὐαγγελίζω (euangelizō), which means the **action** of proclaiming, telling, and announcing the good news.
2. The second is the noun εὐαγγέλιον (euangelion), which itself is the **content** of the good news, that is the News or Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Let me briefly show a scripture.

Matthew 4:23.

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people."

This is important because we are to do something with a message. What are we to do? Share! And what is this message? It's the news of a kingdom coming with the power to heal and restore! And who rules this kingdom? Yes, it is Christ!

Evangelism is proclaiming the victorious news of the Kingdom of God, Jesus Christ and his saving work and the hope of peace with God, the beginning and coming fulfilment of the new creation.

It is sharing the news of Christ's kingdom of peace in a broken world desperately seeking peace!

Outreach

I've defined evangelism, but what is outreach, then?

Is it different? Absolutely!

Outreach or mission is motivated by the understanding that certain contexts have yet to be reached to announce the good news to them.

Think of a place with television reception. People with reception and tv can access the news – they can turn to tv one or tv three at 6pm and hear about the long-awaited news, the victory of Jesus! But what about the locations without Television reception? Or those who can't afford a tv? They are a bit harder to reach. But we need to reach them somehow. They deserve to hear this amazing news. In fact, Christ has commanded this news to be broadcasted by all who call on him.

Consider addiction, for example; how hard can it be to reach these people? What about the injured or lying sick in the back rooms of houses or hospitals? These are harder to reach. What about those with a strong face yet burning with inner turmoil? These are examples of contexts that need the light and peace of Christ; Not to mention all the more visible problems in the world; hunger, violence, and injustice.

It is the body's mandate; leaders and churches; to come together to figure out how we will reach the contexts of need; hurt; hopelessness; victimisation, and to share the word of life in both words and actions. This is the mission of the church!

Burnt in the West

You see, I think bad experiences have burned us in the West. As well as our own ignorance to the biblical *mission of God*. These things cloud our theology and affect our behaviour. We've all seen the angry street preacher and cringed at a Christian sharing the gospel in a not-so-loving way. We've also all experienced rejection too! And None of us likes rejection.

But are these reasons to give up on what Christ has commanded his church to do and said he would give us the power to complete?

Do you remember Matthew 28:18-20 *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"*

Church, we must not shrink back! We must wrestle with the issue; there can be no Christians if people don't know Jesus! And how can they come to believe in Jesus if they have not heard of him? And how can they hear about him without someone first sharing about him?

Sermon Big Idea

So brothers and sisters, let us get right to the root of the issue. Today I want to have conveyed to you the Heart of evangelism.

I could share, "Do this, don't do that," or, "go this way", but I think that returning to the centre, dependence on God says we need his ever-present wisdom right now, not 100 years ago, but today, out there in our cities and countries.

Let me ask, how do we hear what God is speaking to us today? Its Relationship. Therefore, this is the place to start.

Church, if we have God's heart, we will be concerned with what he is concerned with,
 If we behold his face, we will be concerned with what he is looking at,
 If we have his hands, we will be concerned with what he is doing.

Brothers and sisters, if any of us know something of our Father, we know that he is concerned with the broken-hearted, the downcast, downtrodden, heavy burdened, lost people, such as we once were.

God's heart is concerned with the evangelistic mission, but to reach out and evangelise his kingdom in the ways that are going to touch our people's hearts, we must get close to his heart.

Intro to the Text

Today I want to bring you into a particular biblical story to illustrate what I mean by the heart of evangelism.

Please turn to Mark 5:1-20

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Brokenness

2000 pigs! That's a lot of pigs! It's many demons... That man was heavily tormented. Can you imagine someone so troubled that the township (his own people, as Jesus said) had given up all hope for him?

You know, I've been to Israel, and I've been to a location not too far from where this story took place. And in this region, they have these big open rolling hills and fields. If you go out into the plains at night and stand under the stars, it's absolutely beautiful. But as you stand there, you can hear packs of jackals howling to one another from one side of the hills to another. This location is truly a wild place, populated with dangerous animals.

I am saying this because the story says that people would bind him but could no longer due to his physical strength! You see, chained up, discarded by his community; driven into the wild by the demons; naked and exposed in the open to be destroyed by dehydration or starvation, or consumed by Jackals among the tombs. It is plain to see that this man was in a hopeless state, to be accounted as one among the dead.

My question is, can we say that we would love such a person? Or would we be like those in his community, those who gave up on him? I'm getting closer to the heart of evangelism and outreach.

Christ sought us first.

In another place is said that this man was cutting himself.

I want to pause here in self-reflection because this comes a little closer to home. Disturbed, this man was in great pain; so great was his confusion and darkness that he inflicted harm upon himself. It breaks my heart.

Maybe none of us have experienced being cast out of our city, chained up in the open among graves. Perhaps we haven't inflicted harm upon ourselves with jagged rocks or felt demonically attacked like he was. But I think we can all empathise with this man in the feelings of isolation, confusion, loss of stability, and fear.

Put yourself in his shoes. The point I am making is that the tormented man was a person like you or me. The fact is that we are all tormented without Christ.

I cannot pretend to see all your scars. Maybe some of you have even seen some of mine. But one thing I know is this, the God we serve is the God who sees. He knows you and sees you in your pain, sin, and struggles. My Lord, he knows your internal thoughts and the hidden places in your heart. But just like in the text, we see that Jesus is still unafraid of you. He's not afraid of what you have done; he's not scared of your ugliness or your scars. He loves you and does not cease to reach out to you.

Beloved, I'm talking about the personal here, and I will be talking about the wider world and the lost, but it starts here first, in our lives. Evangelism is all about seeing those who don't feel seen. While we were still broken and lost, Christ first saw us.

Fear and Love

Brothers and sisters, I want us to consider the townspeople in the biblical text.

It says that *"the people went out to see what had happened."* It continues, *"When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind"* But it says, *"they were afraid and began to plead with Jesus to leave their region."*

I want to ask you, what was in these people's hearts? Were they filled with Love or fear? Well, we know the answer because it is written that they were afraid.

But you see, love is compassionate; it is kind, and it cares for others. Fear, on the other hand, is self-preserving and selfish.

Imagine seeing the deliverance of the town's designated "crazy person," rather than rejoicing in his healing, it was a cause of concern for the locals. So much so that they pleaded with his deliver to leave them alone!

Do you remember John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*?

Imagine God giving up his son to save people who all they do is kill, steal, and destroy each other. The heart of evangelism is God's heart of Love. And if Christ's Spirit fills us, his perfect love drives out all fear in our lives. It is by being filled with his Spirit and His love that we are empowered to partake in Christ's fearless outreach!

The Mans Response

Let us look at the man who was demonically oppressed.

I really want you to notice was this man's response was. After receiving this abundance of grace and mercy, what did he do? Friends, he cleaved to Christ! He cast himself upon Christ! Our great redeemer, our rock of refuge, our salvation. At first, it was demons begging in fear; now it was a liberated man begging to stay for his love for Christ was so Great! You can see him right there "Let me come with you, oh my Lord and Savior! Never let me out of your sight!"

Beloved, have you been delivered, healed, seen, cleaved to Christ? Do you long to see the day that Christ returns? Do you desire to see his name be glorified? Do you want others to taste the same bread and drink the same waters of life you have drunk from? This is the heart of evangelism. It's to see what God has done for you and to want him to do for others.

Notice our Christ speaking to us through his word today. *"Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."*

Go home, brothers and sisters, to your contexts and people groups; go forth to even the ends of the world, and tell them how much the lord has done for you and how he has had great mercy on you!

Christs Return

in the Eschaton

Church, did you know that one day Christ is going to return? There will be a new heaven and a new earth; this is the new creation that we are already beginning to partake in through Christ, having been sealed by His spirit.

Did you know that He will wipe every tear from our eyes? All injustice will be addressed, all hidden things exposed, and the presence of sin will be dealt with. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, for the old order of things will be done away.

This is the kingdom we preach – that there is hope! There is great hope for an otherwise upside-down and lost world.

In the Text

You know, from the text, I want to show you the faith of the man who was delivered from the demons that day. He obeyed Jesus' command to go home to his own people and tell them how much the Lord had done for him.

At Jesus' words, as it is written, *"...the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."*

Did you know that historically the *Decapolis* referred to a whole number of cities, about ten in number? These were located on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, so in the ten towns, this man travelled around sharing his simple but powerful encounter with Jesus, which amazed people.

I want to tell you that Jesus did come back in the story!

Remember, this story is found in Mark 5, but also in the books of Matthew and Luke too. We find something quite amazing if we read along to Mark 7 (vv.31-37).

It reads, *"Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis."* (Mark 7:31).

So, what this is saying about Jesus, is that after he left the demonic man, he returned to the region a few chapters later.

But let us get more details by reading Matthew's version of this story.

Matthew 15 [vv.29-31] reads, *"Jesus left there [Tyre and Sidon] and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel."*

How amazing is this! Do you see it? My brothers and sisters, I am not the first to point this out; did you catch it?

Jesus Returned to the region of the Decapolis, and Great crowds came to him! Shortly after that, many people were healed and nourished by the words of his lips. Do you remember the feeding of the 4000? This crowd was also nourished by loaves and fishes!

Who do you think evangelised the context of the Decapolis? Why do you think they had so much faith in this Jesus they heard about? That's right, the scholars agree; we can say with quite a high degree of confidence that the once demonically posed man had something significant to do with preparing the way for Christ's return to the region.

Isn't that amazing? Think about how powerful just one testimony can be... Think about how powerful your testimony can be when you share it with someone your heart breaks in compassion for.

Church, surely this is the power of testimony! If you need any evangelising tips this is the best I can give; share what God has done for you in your life! Because, like the man, Jesus came into your life one day. He

saw you sitting there in your brokenness and reached out to you! Your personal testimony is a miracle and will be a source of amazement for those around you!

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters, I will end on this. Like the freed man, will you likewise obey Jesus and evangelise the contexts you find yourselves in?

Evangelism isn't so much about getting people to come to church. It's not about a method or style of sharing Jesus, either. Instead, it's the heart to see God touch people's lives just like he touched yours; and then acting upon this conviction by sharing Jesus.

We must avoid thinking evangelism is a job for a set gifted few. Yes, some are exceptionally good in this area, and these may be given titles of Evangelists, but God has gifted them to equip the whole body. Christ has instructed us all to be a light and to bring his Kingdom to the places we go. And this is why we are doing this sermon today as part of the teachings on the function of the ecclesia.

To be evangelistic-minded means having our eyes opened to the Father's heart for people. It is the simple willingness to participate in Jesus' outreach mission by choosing to submit to his Lordship and partner with the ever-active Holy Spirit in the work he is already doing in this world. . . Church, will you partner with your God in his outreach mission?