

Can I Get a Witness?

Luke 24:36-49

In his book the *No-Guilt Guide for Witnessing*, George Sweeting tells of a man by the name of John Currier who in 1949 was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm.

In 1968 Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him, but he never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on the farm was hard and without any promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died.

Ten years went by. A state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man.

Here is the question Sweeting posed from the story: "Would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message – the most important in your life – and year after year the urgent message was never delivered?"

Our passage today is a reminder that we have been given a message to proclaim, a message of freedom that is to be given to those who are still bound by the chains of sin with a death sentence hanging over them. We who have been freed from the bondage of sin have the responsibility to deliver this same message to those who are still enslaved by sin.

Consider the four lepers in II Kings 7:8-9.

Leadership Journal posted some statistics several years ago. They serve to illustrate how important it is to share the good news of Christ beginning with the young.

Nineteen out of twenty who become Christians do

so before they reach the age of 24.

After 25, only one in 10,000.

After 35, only one in 40,000.

After 45, only one in 200,000.

After 55, only one in 300,000.

After 65, only one in 500,000.

After 75, only one in 700,000.

Now that doesn't mean we should spend less time sharing the gospel with older folks who may be less likely to respond to the gospel. But it does seem that the older someone is the more set in their ways, the more pride plays a part in their rejection of the gospel, and the harder their heart is to being receptive to the gospel.

When I served as a chaplain for hospice one of the nurses was signing on a new patient. She could tell that he was dealing with some personal issues that she felt could be helped by a visit from me and asked if he would like a visit from the chaplain. She said his response broke her heart. "I've lived without God for 89 years, I don't need Him now." As far as I know, that's how he entered eternity.

Take your Bibles and turn to Luke 24:36-49.

The call by Jesus to peace

The commission from Jesus to proclaim

I. THE CALL BY JESUS TO PEACE – vs. 36-43

Our passage is a continuation of the previous text. Two men were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus when a stranger fell in beside them and joined in on their conversation. Their new traveling companion was in fact the risen Christ. They were so excited about seeing Jesus alive they raced back to Jerusalem to share the news with the disciples. The distance was 7 miles. At my best it would have taken me about 45 minutes. It didn't matter how late the hour, they had to share the news that Jesus was indeed alive because they had spent the evening with Him.

Our text today begins by noting that while they were still talking about this with the disciples Jesus appeared.

A. His Reason for Giving Peace – vs. 36-37

Jesus gave them a simple and common greeting. “Peace be with you.”

If you were in the market you extended a greeting of peace to others.

If you were leaving after visiting friends in their home you extended peace.

If you were passing someone on the road you greeted them with words of peace.

Whether greeting someone or bidding someone farewell, words of peace were expressed.

But the words of Jesus are more than just a simple greeting. They had a need for the peace Jesus offered because of their dread.

1. Their dread – v. 37a

The events of the entire weekend left an unsettled feeling and an uncertain future. From Thursday night following the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, the ensuing trials that took most of the night, the denial by Peter and abandonment by all the disciples, the death sentence given by Pilate Friday morning, the brutal beating by the soldiers, His crucifixion and finally death that afternoon had taken an emotional toll on the disciples. Then on Sunday morning to hear from some women that the stone was moved, the body was missing and that one of them had seen Jesus alive was too much to take in. There was confusion, doubt, and fear – all normal emotions under the circumstances. And then Jesus appeared out of nowhere. A word of peace was needed.

They also needed peace because we are told by John that the doors were locked out of fear for the Jews. And then Jesus came and stood among them. I’m not sure which would have been more terrifying a knock on the door or just appearing. A knock

may have sent them into panic fearing the Jews had come to arrest them for being followers of Jesus. So He just appeared!

I don’t blame them for being afraid. I’m sure I would have felt the same way, especially if someone just appeared out of nowhere.

Our text says “they were startled and frightened.”

They were greatly alarmed and afraid.

It reminds me of the incident in Daniel when King Belshazzar saw the hand writing on the wall.

Scripture says he was so afraid, his knees knocked.

They needed words of comfort from Jesus especially since they were so uncertain about all that had taken place that day.

They needed peace because of their dread.

In our fear we also need peace that Christ offers.

Then they needed peace because of their delusion.

2. Their delusion – v. 37b

They thought Jesus was a ghost. This wasn’t the first time they thought they had seen a ghost. It happened during the storm when Jesus walked on the water. They were afraid then and they are afraid now. They thought He was a ghost.

The terms Luke uses are strong words to note how intense their fear was. They needed more than just a hello don’t worry, they needed true peace to settle trouble hearts, peace that only comes from Christ.

So when your soul is deeply troubled do you welcome the peace that Christ gives?

Jesus had a reason for giving peace.

Jesus had a response in giving peace.

B. His Response in Giving Peace – vs. 38-44

Jesus had told them the same thing three days earlier.

John 14:1 “Do not let your heart be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me.”

Have you noticed that the evidence for His resurrection, the proof He gave to the two men traveling to Emmaus was different than it was for the disciples?

To the men on the road to Emmaus He took them to the Old Testament and explained from Scripture everything about the Christ. The proof was in the Word – they should believe it.

But to the disciples He first gave physical proof.

1. His physical proof – vs. 38-43

Do you remember show and tell from your days in grade school? You would take in your favorite toy or talk about some vacation you went on over the summer, or talk about a pet.

Jesus had a little show and tell with the disciples. He gave them two physical proofs.

a. His flesh

To help ease their troubled minds He invited them to look at His hands and feet. John adds that He showed them His side. They were invited to observe the scars and then to touch Him to show them He wasn't a ghost. He had flesh and bones. He wasn't just a figment of their imagination. He was alive standing there in the flesh.

He gave a second physical proof.

b. His food

If that wasn't convincing enough He asked for some food. A ghost doesn't need anything to eat.

Jesus gave physical proof for His resurrection. Then He gave them factual proof.

2. His factual proof – v. 44

The Messiah, Christ, Jesus, the One standing before them is revealed throughout the Old Testament. In verse 44 Jesus took them on a trip down memory lane as He reminded them of the times He spoke about the events that happened to Him. He told them what would take place. And then He told them that everything He had said to them had been mentioned in the Old Testament. We're reminded in Luke 9:45 and 18:34 that often times they didn't understand what He was saying. Mark 16:14 adds that they were “rebuked for their lack of faith and stubborn refusal to believe.”

Anyone remember growing up reading the stories of Amelia Bedilia? She was hired as a maid to take care of a home but misunderstood everything. On her first day instructions were left for her to dust the furniture, draw the drapes, put out the lights and dress the chicken for dinner. When they got home she had put dust on all the furniture, drew a lovely picture of the drapes, put the lights out on the laundry line and dressed the chicken in a beautiful little outfit. She didn't understand the instructions.

Neither did the disciples understand Jesus when He spoke to them about all the things that were going to happen to Him. So He took them back to the Scriptures. For the Jews there were three major divisions of the Old Testament.

The Law of Moses referred to the first five books. The Prophets were all the books of history beginning with Joshua and included both the major and minor prophets.

The Psalms referred to all the books of wisdom.

From them He showed the disciples Old Testament references that He was in fact the Messiah and that He had to suffer, die, and rise again just as it had been foretold. He completely fulfilled all the promises given in Scripture.

These were proofs of His resurrection. These

evidences would provide peace to their troubled minds. How vital it is that we believe what the Bible has to say about Jesus. From the truth of Scripture we gain peace for now and for the future that all things about Jesus have and will happen just as it says.

There was a call by Jesus for peace.

There was a commission by Jesus to proclaim

II. THE COMMISSION BY JESUS TO PROCLAIM – vs. 45-49

It is one thing to be taught something. It is quite another to understand it.

A. The Gospel is Understood – v. 45-46

When all the dots were connected the clarity of the gospel became clear to them. Probably for the first time everything made sense to them. From the Old Testament they understood the gospel.

We need to understand the basics of the gospel if we are going to be able to share it with others. It has to make sense to us but you don't need to be a theologian to understand it. Some of you have heard the ABC's of the gospel.

We have to ADMIT to God that we are a sinner and that even just one sin separates us from God making us His enemies. The result of sin is death. Everyone needs to be saved and admitting we are sinners is but the first step and by no means the only step.

We must BELIEVE that Jesus died for our sin, taking our place. God loves us and offers us salvation as a gift when we believe and receive His gift of forgiveness for sin. That is the second step.

We must CONFESS our sin, need for a Savior and repent. We need to share that decision with others. Romans 10:9 "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be

saved."

The simple truth of the gospel is evident in John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."

He gave them the truth and then He helped them to understand the truth.

We hold the truth in our hands and we come to understand it through the help of the Holy Spirit who has been given to teach us.

For the disciples to proclaim the gospel, they had to first understand it and believe it.

Then in verses 47-48 we see the gospel is unique.

B. The Gospel is Unique – v. 47-49

1. It's unique in its message of deliverance

Man's perspective on eternal life is best summed up by the lawyer who came wanting to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life. From man's understanding it's all about something I have to do to earn it.

God's perspective on eternal life is summed up in these words: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."

When Peter preached the gospel on the Day of Pentecost in the Temple courtyard and the people asked what they must do, Peter said to repent.

Repentance is turning away from sin and following God. Salvation is totally and completely a work of grace – God giving us what we don't deserve. We can't do a thing except admit we're sinners, turn away from following after sin to follow after God, believe that Christ died for our sin and receive the

free gift of God which is salvation.

The uniqueness of the gospel is that it is believed by faith. This sets the gospel and Christianity apart from all other religions because they believe you have to do something to earn eternal life. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly indicates that we are saved only by the grace of God through faith, not by anything we could ever do otherwise we would have something to boast about. And if doing something is required, how much do I have to do like the lawyer thought, or who's to say that the criteria won't change. The grace of God will never change the requirements for salvation because Christ's death and resurrection satisfied the payment owed for sin.

It is a unique message. But not only is the message unique but so is the means of proclaiming that message. In verse 49 we note the means by which they would be able to proclaim the gospel of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

2. It's unique in its means of delivery – v. 49

They would be given the Holy Spirit. It was something promised to them. This promise was given by Jesus in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13-15. The Father would send the Holy Spirit. It would be through His equipping and empowering that they would be able to proclaim the gospel. It is through the Holy Spirit that we can do the same.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson said that the disciples could now see better the will and way of God, that the things which happened to Jesus were necessary to secure salvation, and then he adds that even though they could understand it they still needed the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim it.

Warren Wiersbe has said that “we go forth in the authority of His name and in the power of His Spirit.”

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 1:4-8

This message was to be proclaimed beginning in Jerusalem and they weren't to begin until they had received the promised Holy Spirit. They were to go to the very people who wanted Jesus crucified. They were to go to the very people who rejected Him as Messiah.

Power to proclaim the gospel didn't come because they memorized some speech.

Power to proclaim the gospel didn't come because they attended some seminar on how to give the gospel effectively.

Power to proclaim the gospel came because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. He gave them a boldness they did not have before.

They were to proclaim a gospel of repentance.

They were to proclaim a gospel of forgiveness.

They were to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

The mission of Jesus to seek and save the lost was now being given to them as their mission. It is the same mission and message that has been handed down from generation to generation that we must proclaim the gospel to every nation.

John MacArthur writes: “To fulfill the Lord's command to spread the gospel around the world is the overarching, all-consuming purpose of the church. Everything else, including understanding and teaching sound doctrine, worship, fellowship, prayer, pursuing holiness, and engaging in Christian service, is important and beneficial. But to do all of those things and not proclaim the gospel is to reject the purpose for which those elements exist. They are not the goal, but rather the means to accomplishing the goal of proclaiming the gospel and undergirding that proclamation with lives of credibility and integrity.”

There are wonderful resources available to help people get trained in sharing the gospel.

BSF has a course.

CEF has material and training.

Sunday school curriculum provides helpful instruction.

There are great books, online programs, DVDs and seminars and we have utilized some of them.

They are great tools and they can help us structure and know how to present the gospel clearly. But I'm convinced there is one tool that all too often we fail to use and the number one reason we don't share the gospel. We are not relying on the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We try to witness in our own power.

I have been reading a book titled *Doing Church as a Team* by Wayne Cordeiro. He writes something we should all give serious consideration. "Heaven wasn't the only reason God saved you...It is what God wants to do through you.

Instead of taking you immediately home, God placed a message in your heart – a message of good news about hope beyond the scratch for anyone who "will call upon the name of the Lord" (Romans 10:13). Then He put you back on that scratch for a few more spins. There's a purpose for your life – a divine plan for you. Soon your life and mine will be over; but until then, we have a message to deliver."

The scratch he is referring to is if you took a piece of paper and drew a horizontal line representing all eternity and then somewhere in the middle put a mark, that scratch represents the time you will be here on earth compared to eternity.

He continues with this illustration about a friend who, in college, was nearing the end of a term and still had a major writing assignment to complete. After long days in the library and late nights writing he completed the paper and turned it in. Three days later he received his paper back from the professor with these words written in red: "Great research, Great illustrations. Wonderful bibliography. Grade F...WRONG ASSIGNMENT."

It's possible the Lord could grade us in a similar way: nice home, nice job, nice services, nice (and you fill in the blank)...wrong assignment. We are here to share the gospel. When we get to heaven we are going to see some amazing things: golden streets, angels, and that place that's been prepared for us. But there will be one thing we will not see, one thing that will not be in heaven. Do you know what it is? There will not be any non-Christians.

Cordeiro continues in his book "For the rest of eternity, we will never have another opportunity to share the good news with those who do not know Christ. *Now* is the only chance we have to tell others about the hope available to everyone beyond the scratch, to tell the redemptive story that invites people to eternal life. "The Father will only ask one question of us on that day. 'How many people did you bring with you?'"

Their mission is our mission: to proclaim salvation in the resurrected Christ through repentance. Their means is our means: to proclaim the resurrected Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can do a lot of things like movie nights with Christian movies, and fellowship opportunities, and upgrading sound and facility needs, but they don't mean a thing if we don't share the gospel.

I know I have work to do, will anyone join me?
We have the message. We have the means.