

Christ's gifts to His church Evangelists

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

I would like to begin today's talk on Evangelists by reading from the first chapter of the Book of Jonah. I am reading from the New King James Version of the Bible:

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; and perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.” And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you so that the sea may be calm for us?”—for the sea was growing more tempestuous. And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.” Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, “We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us for innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You.” So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows. Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

We can learn a number of vital lessons from the story of Jonah by further study of the four chapters which make up the Book. However, from the passage which we have just read, I would like to take the five questions which were addressed to Jonah, in quick succession, it would seem, and the answer that Jonah gave in response as background to my Talk today.

We will consider the subject under three main headings:

God cannot overlook sin
God calls and sends special people
God's word achieves its purpose

God cannot overlook sin

Jonah was asked, in chapter 1 verse 8 :

“Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

And, in verse 9, Jonah answered:

“I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

We learn in this chapter that human wickedness is not hidden before God. Our God not only knows of the sins of the people everywhere, but He is offended by them, and He demands repentance of them. We also learn that He has a plan for their salvation.

“Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah chapter 2 verse 9).

and

“not of works” (Ephesians 2:9).

The fundamental problem with humans is stated the words of the writer of Psalm 14 who wrote :

“The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.” (Psalm 14:1 -3).

We also read this:

“God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11).

The Word of God has not changed; it is for all generations.

God calls and sends special people

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me”” (Isaiah 6 verse 8).

The prophets of old, like Isaiah and Jonah, were raised by God for their times to take His word to the people. When we come into the New Testament, we find that the call for repentance remains :

“God...commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts Chapter 17 verse 30).

and God has continued to show that He is not willing that anyone should perish, including all of us today. The Lord Jesus came from God for our salvation.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:16 -19).

A hymn writer also put it like this :

“O Lord of glory! who couldst leave
The height supreme in death to lie ...

“When here on earth Thou wast alone,
Proclaimer of this love to men;
Upon the cross ‘twas fully known,
For God came forth to meet us then;
Rent from above, the parted veil
Announced to all that wondrous tale”

“But risen, the First-born from the dead,
Triumphant hast Thou entered in,
The glorious Man, the living Head,
Thrice worthy Thou our hearts to win;
In Thy blest face all glories shine,
And there we gaze on love divine.”

E. L. Bevir (1847 – 1922).

The Lord Jesus completed the sacrificial work of salvation to the full satisfaction of God the Father and ascended back to Heaven, but the message of salvation still needs to be heard by new generations. The Apostle Paul, wrote in Romans chapter 10 and verses 11 – 18:

“For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of

God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

In his Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4 and verses 11-13 , the Apostle Paul also wrote:

"He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

So, the gifts have a heavenly origin. Gift and suitable grace are given to every member by our exalted, sovereign Lord. From the giving of Christ to "each" (Ephesians 4 verse 7), we come now to the giving "some." It is necessary to distinguish between having a gift and being a gift. Some men are given as gifts themselves. While certain are "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2) some are "teachers" (Ephesians 4 :11), and while certain might "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5), some are "evangelists" (Ephesians 4 :11).

First, He gave apostles and prophets, and the church is built upon the foundation of apostles. Apostles were invested with authority (1 Corinthians 5:4; 14:37; 1 Timothy 1:20) and they were set in first in order in the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28). The foundation has been laid and the apostles have passed away, though we still have the benefit of these gifts in the writings of the New Testament. The remaining gifts, evangelists, teachers and pastors, are for the building up of the Church, the foundation having been laid. These gifts continue during the whole period of Church history on earth.

The order of the gifts merits attention. The evangelist comes first as the gift by which lost souls can be drawn into the circle of blessing. Theirs is the work of "rescuing the perishing" (Proverbs 24:11 - paraphrased). A hymn writer put it like this:

Rescue the perishing
Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave
Weep o'er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the Mighty to save.

Though they are slighting Him,
Still He is waiting
Waiting the penitent child to receive:
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently;
He will forgive, if they only believe.

Fanny Crosby (1820 – 1915).

The hymn speaks to the spiritually lost condition of humankind and each person's need of a Saviour. The song became well known by missionaries and was often sung at rescue missions.

Being brought into the Church, believers come under the gifts of the pastor and teacher. We could say, the evangelist brings Christ before the world and the pastor and teacher brings Christ before the believer. These gifts are discussed in other Talks in this series : Talk T1367, T1369 and Talk T1370.

God's word achieves its purpose

As we saw in our reading about Jonah, the call to preach is from God. The place to preach may not always be accommodating, sometimes fraught with difficulties; with people who do not know God and need salvation. Evangelists are really God's Instruments in the extension of the Church. They are itinerant people and go to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus in areas where it had not been previously known.

Philip is the only man in Scripture specifically described as an evangelist, to differentiate him from his namesake, who was one of the Twelve. His main service was spreading the Good News of Christ and therefore played a very important part in the fulfilment of our Lord's commission to go "into all the world", and if need be, to preach "to every creature" (Mark 16:15). We see these features in Philip in the account of his responding to the voice of an angel of the Lord and going to a desert place. There Philip encounters and engages with the Ethiopian in the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus (Acts Chapter 8:26 – 40).

We learn from this that the Evangelist must have: a zeal for the Lord; a passion for souls; an understanding of the Scriptures; and must be ready to baptise the believer. The Evangelist does not always have an easy passage in the work, as we saw in our reading about Jonah. His is the story of a reluctant missionary who was taught by bitter experience the lesson of obedience and the depth of divine mercy. The word of God has this to say:

"Those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:5 – 6).

This part of the Psalm inspired a well-known hymn by Knowles Shaw (1834 – 1878),

"Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,
Fearing neither clouds nor winter's chilling breeze;
By and by the harvest, and the labour ended,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Go then ever, weeping, sowing for the Master.
Though the loss sustained, our spirit often grieves;
When our weeping's over, He will bid us welcome,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Today

The mission field is still truly vast and not confined to foreign lands. Each gift is for the building up of the whole body of Christ, and many gifts can be exercised in local churches. The "work of an evangelist" of which the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to do, is also for us today. Each one of us is responsible to help. This can be done in a whole variety of ways, including and not limited to, public preaching, giving out gospel literature, one-to-one conversations, youth work, billboards presenting Gospel verses to the public with a slogan to read the Bible and Gospel Tents for evangelisation meetings.

This is how the saints are using the gifts,

"For the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12 -13).

The Church has been growing since the work that we read about in the Acts of the Apostles. The Church has a divine origin and a divine destiny. Her visible unity is not for this present age because she is not yet complete. I would like to conclude my Talk with the words of another well-known author's Hymn

“Go labour on; spend and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?

Toil on, faint not, keep watch and pray;
Be wise, the erring soul to win;
Go forth into the world's highway,
Compel the wanderer to come in.

Toil on, and in thy toil rejoice;
For toil comes rest, for exile home;
Soon shalt thou hear the Bridegroom's voice,
At daybreak cry “Arise and Come””

H. Bonar (1808 – 1889).

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today Talk “Evangelists”, Talk Number T1368, in the Series, “Christ's gifts to His Church.”

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