

Evangelise!

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Richard, for reading that. Good morning, everyone. Please keep your Bibles open in Acts 8, and I'm going to pray as we come under God's Word this morning. Let's bow our heads. His Heavenly Father, we do pray that as we come to sit under your Word, help us to remember that these are your words, that this is what you want us to hear this morning.

And Lord, would you speak? I pray, Lord, that these wouldn't be my words, but that your words would come out of your Word, and that each of us would hear from you this morning, and we would know what it means for our lives as we go out into a new week.

And so we pray, draw close to us, and by your Holy Spirit, minister to us in Jesus' name. Amen. I want to ask you a question. What are you going to do this coming week that will matter 100 million years from now?

Think about it. The company you work for won't exist. Your family will be long gone. Your social cause or your charity work won't matter.

The amount of money you make will mean absolutely nothing 100 million years from now. The only thing that will matter in 100 million years' time is who is in heaven and who is in hell.

[1 : 15] And if you're a Christian, I want to tell you something this morning. If you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then God has given you a job to do that affects eternity.

Think about that for a second. God has given you a job to do that is going to affect people's ultimate destiny. And that is the job of sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, which we've already spoken a lot of this morning.

And I want to speak more of. Because it's so central. Because at the end of the day, the only thing that you can do in life that really matters is to talk about Jesus to someone else.

Nothing else will matter 100 million years from now. And my job as a pastor is to help you to do that. My job as a pastor is not to make you feel comfortable or to make you happy or to, you know, do anything that often pastors are seen to do.

My job as a pastor primarily, according to the Bible, is to equip the saints for works of ministry. To tell the gospel. And over the next few months, we've got ample opportunity to do that.

[2 : 22] As you would have heard, Adrian mentioned a lot of the things we're doing that's going to help us to get involved in the work of sharing the gospel in various different ways. And you can be involved in that work in many ways.

The question is, are you going to be involved in that? Are you going to be involved in our movie evenings? Are you going to be involved in the course where we're going to learn how to share the gospel? There's other things. Christmas time presents lots of opportunities to share the gospel with people.

Are you going to take advantage of those opportunities? Well, this morning, I want to motivate you to do that. I'm going to put my cards on the table. The purpose of my sermon this morning is to motivate you to be involved in that work of sharing the gospel.

And I want to do that by joining the first Christians, the very first generation of Christians we read about in Acts 8. And I want to discover together how they got involved in the work of evangelism and just what that looked like.

And I want to focus just on one verse this morning to see what we can learn from it and just to guide our own evangelistic efforts as a church over the next few months. And that verse is verse 4 of chapter 8.

[3 : 27] Acts 8, verse 4. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Now, from this verse, I just want us to consider three things this morning. Firstly, just what the work of evangelism is.

Secondly, who does it? And thirdly, where and how this happens. So firstly, what? What is it? Well, according to this verse, the early Christians were involved in preaching the word.

But in the original text that the Bible was written in, in Greek, the word used here for preaching is actually a different word to the word that's normally used for preaching.

The word used here is literally the word evangelize. Not just preach, but evangelize. Which, let me just do a little word study. The word evangelize actually comes from two Greek words.

You, meaning good, and angel, meaning message. And that's why God's messengers are called angels, by the way. And so, whatever you think evangelism means, when you boil it down, the word evangelism really means simply sharing a good message.

[4 : 28] That's all it means. In fact, it was the same word used of messengers in the ancient world who brought news of a great military victory. They were also, the same word to evangelize was used of them.

So, after a king had fought a final battle and routed an enemy, he would entrust a messenger to run all the way home and take news of that victory back to the capital city.

So, that all the people could find out that their enemy was finally defeated. And they could breathe a sigh of relief. They can rest easy. The war is won. And this messenger had this very important, good message to take home and to tell people.

And he was entrusted with that messenger. And he would be called the evangelist. That's literally what they would call that messenger, that military messenger who took that message. The bringer of good news, the evangelist.

Well, you know, that's exactly what evangelism is today. Because our heavenly king, think about it, our heavenly king has entrusted us with a message that we've got to take to the world.

[5 : 30] Which is much greater than any earthly victory. No, it's the news that on the cross of Jesus Christ, when Jesus died and took the penalty for sin, the central act in human history, and then he rose again three days later.

At that moment, the battle was won against sin and death. Our greatest enemies were defeated there on the cross. And that is good news. That is tremendous news. It's a tremendous good message.

And the people who receive that message and trust that king can now rest easy and breathe a sigh of relief in the knowledge that their guilt is taken away. That the gates of heaven are opened.

Eternal life is available through Jesus' righteousness. And death has lost its sting. We don't need to fear death anymore. That is good news. There is no greater message. There is no greater news that humans could ever hear, that sinful humans could ever hear, than the assurance of forgiveness for their sins and the certainty of eternal life to those who believe it.

No other message, think about it, no other message in the world can ever give you that kind of assurance. No other message can give you certainty of where you will go when you die, other than the message of Jesus Christ.

[6 : 44] It is a good message. It is the best message. And the task of evangelism is simply sharing that message with someone else. So that's what it is.

But the second question we need to ask is, who is meant to do that? That's really what it comes down to. So let's see who did that in the early church.

And the answer might surprise you. Let's have a look at who. We're told, again, verse 4, those who had been scattered preached the word, literally evangelized, wherever they went. Okay, so who were these people?

Let's consider, who were these people who, and why had they been scattered in the first place?

Well, if you had read just before this, we read a story of a man named Stephen.

Stephen. He was a Christian man who was sharing the good news of Jesus in Jerusalem. But then some thugs who didn't want to hear it started arguing with him and caused a scene.

[7 : 40] And Stephen ended up being arrested. And the authorities, who didn't like Christians at all, they saw this as an opportunity to make an example of Stephen.

And so they arranged a mob to publicly execute him, which they did. They stoned him to death in the middle of the street. And from that moment on, the floodgates opened and a violent persecution broke out against the Christians in Jerusalem, forcing many of them to flee from their homes, to get out of the city and to find shelter elsewhere in the country.

And it was these Christians, these Christians who were scattered by this persecution, these were the ones who were told went out and shared the good news of Jesus wherever they went.

Is that what you would do? If this very message was what got you in trouble in the first place?

Would you go out and share it boldly?

Well, that's what they did. Even though it was the very same message that got them scattered, you'd think it's the last thing they'd talk about. And yet, for them, it was too good not to share.

[8 : 45] They didn't care. They just had to share this message. They couldn't shut up about it.

Which is a challenge for us, isn't it? I mean, let me ask you, is the good news of Jesus for you too good not to share?

To your work colleagues, to your family members, to your friends. And I ask it of you sitting in the pew. Because here's the very interesting thing. If you look back at Acts 8 verse 1, it tells us who these people who were scattered actually were.

Have a look. On that day, this is verse 1, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. And note this, all except the apostles, all except the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

And so notice something there. The leaders of the church, the apostles, they stayed back in Jerusalem to carry on the work. But it was everyone else. It was the ordinary, everyday believers like you.

They were the ones who went out sharing the gospel. They were the ones who just naturally, wherever they were, shared this good message of Jesus because they couldn't keep quiet about it.

[9 : 54] Around the well, collecting water, at the marketplace, in the field, at the dinner table, wherever it was. The work of evangelism back then in the early church was simply the natural outflow of joy that ordinary Christians had in the good news of Jesus.

It's like, let's say, for example, you win free tickets to watch your favorite band live in concert. All right?

Let's say there was a competition and you won these free tickets. Well, what's the first thing you do? You want to tell people. You want to post it on Facebook so all the world can find out that you won tickets, even if they don't care. You know, good news, you want to share it, you're excited about it.

Or if you fall in love, you want to tell your friends at the pub. You want to share it with your work colleagues, even if they don't care. Or, I don't know, you get a new puppy or whatever it is.

Some good news. What you naturally want to do when you have good news is you want to tell other people. It's just that's the nature of good news, that you automatically want to share it. Just like it was automatic for these first believers to share the good news of Jesus.

[11 : 00] They didn't question it. It just happened naturally. But now I want us to consider this morning, is that the same with us? And I don't think it is. It isn't automatic for us, is it?

It isn't natural for us to share the good news of Jesus. Let's be honest. Why? Why? What changed between those Christians that we read of in Acts 8 and Christians today?

Why doesn't it come naturally for us as it did for them? Well, let me tell you why not. Firstly, it's because most Christians today don't think evangelism is their job.

They think it's up to the trained pastors and the professionals and the preachers. It's their job to do evangelism. And so they don't prepare to do it and they don't look out for opportunities to do it.

Because it's someone else's job. But we've just seen in Acts 8, that wasn't always the case, was it? The early Christians didn't think it was anyone else's job to share their good news, but their own job.

[12 : 08] And because of this, every Christian was sharing the gospel. And the church grew phenomenally in those first few decades. At rates we've never seen since. Until within a few generations, the whole previously pagan Roman Empire was officially Christian.

Just a few centuries later. It was amazing. But that's actually where the problem started. If you know anything about church history, when Roman Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity, he was the first Christian Roman Emperor.

He made Christianity the official state religion around the middle of the 4th century. Which meant that suddenly, millions of pagans from around the Roman Empire, you know, whether it was Picts or Celts or Franks or Goths, they started coming to church because they had to.

They just started coming to church because it was the official religion. But they weren't saved necessarily. And so the church got full of people who didn't even know the gospel of Jesus, let

alone want to share it with others.

And you know what that meant? That meant that little by little, the task of evangelism moved away from the congregation and onto the clergy. It moved away from the people sitting in the pews where it was originally, the task of evangelism, and it moved on to the trained professionals.

[13 : 19] They were the ones now who were seen as the only ones who could share the gospel.

And that view, that view that the professionals do evangelism, which started around the 4th century, has remained right up until today in the church.

But that's not how the first Christians operated, we see in Acts. They knew that it was everyone's job to share the good news that they discovered, joyfully and naturally.

And that's why the church grew at the rates it did. And so maybe, maybe you've been coming to St. Mark's for a long time, and you look around and you wonder why our church isn't growing.

You know, just maybe. Maybe you're saying, oh, we got that new pastor two years ago. We were supposed to see the church grow by now, but it hasn't. Well, maybe. Maybe that's because you wrongly think it's the pastor's job to do evangelism and not yours.

And so you don't make the effort to get involved in that work. But think about it. Just think about it.

How will this church ever grow? If one person is doing evangelism, or if 110 people are?

[14 : 24] See, that's the first reason, I think, that we don't share the gospel, is that people incorrectly think that it's the trained pastors whose job it is. It's not.

My job is to equip you to do that. But there's another reason that Christians don't naturally share the gospel, and that is because it's just not comfortable. Let's be honest. It could lead to a loss of reputation, a loss of friendship, a loss of job promotions.

If people you speak to don't like what you say about Jesus, which many don't today, there's a cost.

There's a cost to evangelism. Well, you know why these first Christians who were scattered from Jerusalem, you know why they didn't worry about that cost?

Because they had already paid it. They had already felt persecution for their faith. And they had already been scattered, and so they had nothing to lose.

You know, they were already being persecuted for the gospel. Why not tell it to people? They may as well share it if they're already suffering for it. In fact, we read in Acts 8, it was only after the Christians were forced out of their comfort zones that they really started opening their mouths to share the gospel.

[15 : 35] Because one of the greatest hindrances to evangelism is our own comfort. And so to do the job of evangelism, we actually need to be, you need to be willing to leave your comfort zone.

Are you willing to do that? Because it's not going to be comfortable. If we're going to have any chance of opening our mouths about Jesus to our neighbors and our friends and our colleagues, we've got to make a conscious effort to do something that's going to make us uncomfortable.

Are you willing to leave your comfort zone? Are you willing to risk your reputation to do the work that matters 100 million years from now? These early Christians did because they had no choice.

They were already being persecuted. They were already forced out of their comfort zones. But we aren't persecuted actively in this country. And nice as that is, it's a problem.

And I hope you can see this morning what the problem of not being persecuted is. The problem is because we will constantly fear to be persecuted if we open our mouths about Jesus. What we've got to realize is that we will be.

[16 : 43] It's inevitable. And so we've just got to get over ourselves and do it. You know, Paul writes in 2 Timothy, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. That's what the Bible says. But what does he mean? I mean, you don't get persecuted for just doing good works and giving to charity and helping little old ladies across the street and being a nice person.

You don't get persecuted for that. No, a godly life in Christ Jesus means sharing the gospel about Jesus. And that will be uncomfortable. The question is, are you willing to step out of your comfort zone to do that?

Because it is the job of all Christians to share the good news that they've experienced. Of course, the assumption is that you have experienced that good news.

That you do, that you have tasted the grace of Jesus Christ and the assurance of eternal life. That his death afforded for you. That he is your king. That he is your Lord.

[17 : 49] Because if he isn't, if you're a Christian just by name only, maybe you just want to consider. Maybe this sharing the gospel, this idea of evangelism is totally foreign to you. Well, you know, Alan quoted from Charles Spurgeon earlier where he gave a great diagnosis to determine if you are truly a follower of Jesus Christ or not.

And that is, what did he say? Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter. Do you want to share the news you've experienced? If you don't, then maybe it's because you haven't truly experienced it.

And if that's the case, please come speak to me or speak to the person who invited you to church to ask you just what is so great about Jesus? What is so great about this news? And what's great about it is that through Jesus, you can know for sure where you're going in eternity.

And you can know God in a real living, active relationship in this life. Through Jesus. But finally, I want us to see this morning just where evangelism happens.

So we've looked at what it is. We've looked at who does it. But where, where do we do this? Where do we share the gospel? Well, we're told that these early Christians did this wherever they went.

[19 : 05] So it wasn't only at particular places or at particular times. You know, it wasn't only at church or at special outreach events or at movie nights. It was in any situation that they had the opportunity.

And you'll find that God makes opportunities when we're looking for them, opportunities in our lives to talk about Jesus when we least expect them. You know, I remember once popping next door to my neighbor because I wanted to use his parking space because we had guests coming over and he had a spare parking space.

So I knocked on the door, all I wanted to do, all I planned to do, nothing except pop over, ask him if I could use his parking space and go back to my place. But you know what? I knocked on the door, I asked him and we ended up talking for about 50 minutes about Jesus.

I ended up sharing the gospel with him just because conversation went that way and allowed it and the opportunity arose. But I didn't plan it. And so we've got to be on the lookout for those opportunities wherever we go.

Because God directs when those conversations happen and they might happen when you least expect them. So be on the lookout. In fact, we read here in Acts 8 that God was directing the whole thing.

[20 : 15] He was achieving his purposes in ways that no one would have expected. I want you to do something. Look back at Acts 8 verse 1 in your Bibles.

And I want you to notice something about that verse. I'll read it. On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. And all except the apostles were scattered.

Notice where? Throughout Judea and Samaria. Okay, they were in Jerusalem. And then because of this persecution, they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Now, I want you to turn from Acts 8.1 to Acts 1.8.

If you can work that out. Acts 1.8. And look what it says. This is Jesus talking to his first disciples. Look what he says. Acts 1.8. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria. And the ends of the earth. Isn't that interesting? Little did they know that when Jesus made that prophecy that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria.

[21 : 20] That would be through the church being persecuted. Not through their own plans and strategies and outreaches. But through them being forced out. They didn't decide to go on a mission trip to Judea and Samaria.

You know, Jesus has said we're going to be witnesses in Judea and Samaria. So let's plan an overseas mission. We can do short-term missions. We can raise funds. No, they didn't do any of that. It was through God allowing this persecution to happen that they were forced out.

God arranged the circumstances to take them there when they didn't go there. And they were just then ready to use the opportunities that that afforded in ordinary life to talk about Jesus.

And that is how the early church grew and spread. And in the same way today we do evangelism. Not primarily where we plan to do it. But where God gives us opportunities every day.

You know, statistics show that the vast majority of people who come to faith in Christ. Don't do so because of some event that they went to.

[22 : 27] But simply because of a friend sharing Jesus with them. That is how a vast majority of people come to faith. I'm sure many of you, if you're Christians here this morning, can testify to that. It was through someone you knew, a relationship that you had, sharing Jesus with you. And so, when we run events at this church, for example, we don't do it primarily like these movie events, for example.

The movie events aren't primarily to give the gospel to the people who come. You know, the movies we're going to watch aren't going to be particularly Christian. They're just good, well-made movies to invite people to.

We run these events to give you opportunities to build relationships with people. And opportunities to invite them back to church and opportunities to talk to them about Jesus. These events are serving you.

And so, with all the things we do at church, I want you to see them as opportunities for you to build those relationships so that you can simply, naturally, joyfully talk about what Jesus means to you when the opportunities arise.

[23 : 33] Because that's when evangelism happens. Not primarily at these big events or outreaches or crusades, but in relationships, over coffee, over the fence, at work, at the water cooler, wherever it is, where God directs the opportunities to arise.

So, in closing, I want to ask, what must we do now, based on all that we've learned this morning from Acts 8, verse 4? We can learn a lot from just one verse, can't we?

Well, firstly, as individual Christians, we must all make sure that we're ready to share the gospel message when those opportunities arise. Are you ready for that?

Do you know what to say? If that came, if that opportunity came, and you had an opportunity, you know, a chance to talk about Jesus, would you know where to start? Would you know how to explain the gospel message in simple terms that people would understand?

Well, if you don't, that's why we've got this evangelism training coming up. That you can come and you can learn simple methods to share the best news that anyone has ever heard with someone else.

[24 : 37] Why wouldn't you want to do that? So, Sylvia has a sign-up sheet where you can sign up for this course. And I encourage you to sign up today before you think up an excuse not to.

Because that's what's going to happen. You're going to be today, you're going to go, oh, you know, I should sign up for that course. You're going to go home, and you're going to think up subconsciously, think up, oh, you know, there was the dinner invite, and my favorite TV show's on, and oh, no, I can't go.

So, just don't let that happen. Just shortcut the process and sign up today. But the second thing we must do as a church, so that's the first thing. We must all make sure we're ready. As 1 Peter 3.15 says, always be prepared to give an answer to those who ask you for the hope that you have.

Be prepared. Secondly, though, as a church, what I've learned from this passage is that we must not rely on our plans and strategies primarily, and our events, to grow the church.

We can often do that. We can often think up these grand strategies and these clever things and these events and rely on that for the church to grow. But we mustn't do that because we don't grow the church.

[25 : 45] God grows the church. And we need to submit to God's plans and to God's strategies, which are often very different to our own. And that's why this week, Tuesday, I want to call the congregation of St. Mark's to a day of prayer and fasting.

To submit our plans to God in the coming months. You can still go to work, but if your health allows, I encourage you to fast in the daylight hours to commit this day to God and a way to pray.

And commit at least 30 minutes or more to prayer, perhaps the 30 minutes that you would have been eating breakfast or lunch. Prayer for our church.

Prayer for evangelism. Prayer for evangelism in our own lives. Prayer for those people who we know who don't know Jesus. Prayer for opportunities. You know, we've got to take this seriously. And fasting and prayer is a great way to do that.

Fasting is an important Christian discipline. We see it throughout the Bible as a way that people just rededicated themselves to God's work. And ask God to energize them and renew their desires to be His desires.

[26 : 55] And on your way in, you would have received a guide that just explains what fasting is about and how to do it. And where it is in the Bible. And so use that. Read that.

And this is just one of the ways that we all, as a church here in Plumstead, need to take our job more seriously. Because I ask again, what are you going to do this week that will matter 100 million years from now?

Well, let me close by reading a quote from Charles Spurgeon again. He says this, If Jesus is precious to you, you will not be able to keep your good news to yourself.

You'll be whispering it into your child's ear. You'll be telling it to your husband. You'll be earnestly imparting it to your friend. Without the charms of eloquence, you'll be more than eloquent.

Your heart will speak and your eyes will flash as you talk of His sweet love. Every Christian here is either a missionary or an imposter. Recollect that.

[28 : 02] You either try to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ or else you do not love Him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus and a totally silent tongue about Him.

The man who says, I believe in Jesus, but does not think enough of Jesus ever to tell another about Him by mouth or pen or tract is an imposter. Be wise in your generation and speak of Him in fitting ways and at fitting times so that in every place proclaim the fact that Jesus is most precious to your soul.

Will you join us in that work? Let's pray. Yes, Heavenly Father, we pray that that would be true of us. That in our generation, we would speak of Jesus in fitting ways and at fitting times.

And in every place proclaim the fact that Jesus is most precious to our souls. And so, Lord, I pray for those who have tasted the glory of the gospel message, the assurance of eternal life.

I pray for them, Lord. I pray that you would give them a strong desire that would never go away to share this message with others. Lord, I pray for those amongst us this morning who may not have tasted that glorious gospel.

[29 : 18] Who may just be Christians in name only. Lord, I pray that you would open their eyes to see the glories in Jesus Christ. That they would see Him truly as their Savior and King.

And that they would commit their lives to following Him. And Lord, I pray for us as a church. I pray, Lord, that you would use everything we do. That you would help us to submit ourselves to your plans.

That you would take what we are and take what we have and take our presence in this community. And give us great opportunities to share the gospel. And Lord, we pray for this day of prayer and fasting on Tuesday.

That you would be merciful to us. That you would hear our prayers. And that you would act in accordance with your plans and with your glory. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.