

Evangelism: What, why and how?

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Preacher: Jon Morrison

[0 : 00] Good morning. I greet you in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and I bring greetings from St. Peter's Church in Fishwick. They're very excited that I was coming here to talk to you today. My name is John Morrison. It's a great privilege to be with you and share God's Word.

Good. I'm currently doing a curacy at St. Peter's Church in Fishwick. So I look after the mission portfolio. I look after evangelism. And I'm here with my wife, Lee, my son, Aaron, and my son, Kai. And it's wonderful to be with you today. Thanks for having me.

Let me pray for God's help as we turn to his Word. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, would you be our teacher this morning? By your Spirit, please convict us.

motivate us and transform us as we look at your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, without a shadow of a doubt, the most famous ship of all time has to be the Titanic.

It's the supposedly unsinkable ship that on its maiden voyage in 1912 sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Movies have been made. Books have been written about it.

[1 : 16] But few of them will include the story of Scottish evangelist John Harper. Harper was a passenger on the Titanic. He was traveling to Chicago to take up an appointment as a pastor at Moody Church.

He had his daughter Nana on board with him. And when the Titanic struck that iceberg and began to sink, he put his daughter Nana onto a lifeboat.

And he ran through the ship, yelling, women, children, and the unsaved, into the lifeboats. When the ship finally went down, he had already given his life jacket away.

Survivors reported that to the very end, Harper was witnessing to anyone that would listen. One survivor recalls, clinging to the ship's bar, when Harper floated near him.

Man, he said, are you saved? No, I'm not, said the man. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, pleaded Harper. The waves carried him away, but they brought him back a little bit later.

[2 : 20] Are you saved now, asked Harper. No, I honestly can't say I am, said the man. And again, Harper pleaded with him. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

And shortly afterwards, Harper went down. And the man who survived was one of only six people to be rescued. And in a public meeting some four years later, this is what he said when he recounted the episode.

Now what would possibly have made John Harper go to such extremes in the face of his impending death?

How did he push to his own fear in that situation and reach out to others with the saving message of Christ? It's a great question to ask as we look at the what, why, and how of evangelism.

What do you feel when I say the word evangelism? Maybe you feel terror. Maybe uncertainty or inability. I don't know what to do.

[3 : 32] Maybe you're excited. Maybe joy. Maybe enthusiasm. And what if I said right now, come everybody, we're going to go out onto the streets and we're going to go and evangelize.

What would your first reaction be? I can't do that. I don't know enough about the Bible. You do it, I'll watch. Or me, no, no. I'm too shy.

I could never consider evangelizing. Or maybe you're like, yeah, come on, let's go. Well, whatever you feel about the idea of evangelizing others, my prayer this morning is that you would be open to hearing why it's one of the most important things you can do as a Christian.

I want to spend our time together this morning looking at what evangelism is, why we should do it, and how it's done. Let's start at the beginning. No, not Genesis.

But what is evangelism anyway? Is it something we've just heard from the John Harper story where we go around telling everyone about God's salvation as they face death?

[4 : 38] Maybe it's going onto the streets of Plumstead and knocking on someone's door and telling them about Jesus. Is it making sure you know the Gospels backwards?

To each of those questions, the answer is yes and no. Evangelism is those things, but they're just some of the ways. What I can claim, excuse me, let me just say this up front, just as a preface.

I don't know everything about evangelism. I don't claim to know the best way or the fastest way or the easiest method. But what I can claim is this. The Bible is very clear.

If you follow Jesus, be his witness. What I can also say is that any strategy for personal evangelism is better than none at all. Evangelist D.L. Moody spoke with a woman once who didn't like his method of evangelism very much.

I don't really like mine either, he said. What's yours, he asked her. I don't have one, she said. Then I like mine better, he replied. So what is evangelism?

[5 : 47] Firstly, let me define evangelism and then we can have a look at some biblical examples. The word evangel comes from the Greek word euangelion. The original meaning referred to the bringer of good news.

This was a person who would usually have momentous news. They would run back from the battlefield with a story of victory. They would come to the king or the commander.

And they were often rewarded for their efforts. So an evangel is a bringer of good news. That's why we call angels angels, by the way. Evangel, angel.

They bring good news. So in the Christian context, it's the good news about Jesus. So what is it that Jesus brought us? What was his good news?

Well, in Mark's gospel, he says this. The time has come, repent and believe the good news. In the four gospels and in other parts of scripture, we learn that the good news is momentous news of God's salvation plan coming to fulfillment through his son, the historical man Jesus Christ.

[6 : 54] In fact, Jesus is the good news himself. It's not just about him. Because of him alone, there's a way that God's anger at sin can be atoned for.

And Jesus is atoned for the sins of the world by his life, his death, his resurrection and his ascension. He's fully God and mediates God to us.

And he's fully man, acting as our mediator to God. In accepting this good news, a twofold response occurs. A believer will repent or turn from their sin and believe that Jesus is the king of God's kingdom.

And this will then obviously lead to a transformed life. A movement from being in rebellion to God to loving and serving him through Jesus. So in the Christian context, it's the good news that's being proclaimed about the king of God's kingdom, Jesus Christ.

Some biblical examples include Isaiah 6. We just read that in the Old Testament reading this morning. Isaiah was one of Israel's great prophets. He experiences a vision.

[8 : 07] And in it, he's asked to go and preach a message. That is to the people of Israel. The message, go and tell this people, Israel, be ever hearing, never understanding.

Be ever seeing, never perceiving. Make the heart of these people calloused. Make their ears dull. And close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears.

Understand with their hearts. And here's the gospel turned and be healed. Isaiah went on to proclaim to this people who wouldn't listen. And they ended up in exile. Around 586 BC.

You see, God made their hearts hard. God made them deaf to his gospel message. Today, in our evangelistic needs, we need to be more than just delivering a message.

We need to deliver a message clearly enough that those listening can respond to it. Did you notice how Isaiah, in verse 5, felt unworthy when his eyes fell on the king, the Lord Almighty?

[9 : 13] See what he says. Woe to me. I'm a man of unclean lips. But the coal from the altar atones for his sin. The coal was from the sacrifice.

And he goes on to serve the Lord. And as believers, we can also feel unworthy. We can feel unworthy to tell people about Jesus.

But like Isaiah, if you're a believer, your sins are being forgiven by the sacrifice of Jesus. And so you can legitimately say, send me. In Matthew 10, the disciples go out to preach to Israel.

The kingdom of heaven is near. That's their message. And we read in Matthew 24, verse 14. Jesus is speaking about the end of the age to the disciples. And he says this.

The kingdom will be preached in the whole world. Notice that will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And then the very famous one, Matthew 28, verse 19.

[10:13] 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've commanded you.

Now, of course, these verses are addressed to the disciples 2,000 odd years ago. But they apply to us today as well. How can I say that?

Well, do you see what came before the command? Go and make disciples. Matthew 28, verse 18. All authority on heaven, in heaven rather, and on earth has been given to me.

That's Jesus. In verse 20, he says, He will be with us to the very end of the age. You see, it's a command to the disciples, but it's a command to us today.

And to every believer till the very end of the age. So with these few verses in mind, we could say that evangelism is the bearing of momentous news about the king of God's kingdom, who's come to save us from God's anger at sin.

[11:19] And we are tasked with making this king known to the whole world, in partnership with Jesus, to the very end of the age. So that's the what of evangelism.

And secondly, the why. When it comes to making God known, you might object, Isn't God all powerful? Why does he need me? What can I do?

He knows who he's going to save. What difference can I make? Maybe you think, It's Nick's job. Maybe he should be the evangelist. Or maybe there's one of you sitting here today who loves evangelism.

Maybe he should be the evangelist. Anyway, doesn't one Corinthian speak about different gifts? Well, it does, but it doesn't mention anything specifically about evangelism.

Rather, evangelism is for everyone. And it isn't just something we do. It's something we believe. We evangelize because it's actually the most loving thing to do.

[12:19] Think for a moment how you first heard about Jesus. And most of you heard through someone else, right? And maybe you were invited to, I don't know, youth.

And you went along to youth. And maybe you were invited to a church event and you got to know some Christians. Or maybe one of your friends sat you down and explained the gospel. There's no doubt people were involved somehow in most of our conversion stories.

You see, when we come to know the Jesus, the Jesus of the gospel, the Jesus of the Bible, when we come to know him, we know that it's the most loving thing to do to tell others about him, right? We know that. Deep down, we know that. And when we remind ourselves, life here on earth only has two possibilities. Think about it. Two possibilities.

Number one, you hear the gospel clearly, you repent, you believe, you have your sins atoned for, and you're saved to eternal life. Number two, those who never hear the gospel clearly, or not at all, or they hear it, but they never repent and believe.

[13:34] Well, they face Jesus on judgment day. Our reading in Romans 10 is very clear. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But then comes that question.

Well, how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they've not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And how can they preach unless they're sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news. People need to hear about Jesus.

So they can call on him for salvation. People need to understand that the gospel is for them. To see they're in need of forgiveness for their own sin.

Next week, Carl Pienaar, also from St. Peter's, will be sharing about the foolishness of the cross. Looking at how the message is foolish, how the messengers are foolish, but so are the people that are being preached to.

[14:39] The most loving thing to do is to gently and humbly share the gospel message of Jesus. It will seem foolish to some. But by giving them an opportunity to respond, it means they might just think about it.

But another motivation is to evangelize because it's a command. Go into the world and preach the good news to all of creation. Mark 16 verse 15.

Go and make disciples. Matthew 28 verse 19. We might know the book of Acts quite well. We see at Pentecost, people hear the gospel in their own language and they turn to the Lord.

So we have a biblical example of when the command is obeyed, the Lord uses it to transform people. Now we know God chooses, or rather does the work of converting people.

It's not our work, it's his work. But we know he chooses to partner with us. It was the disciples then in the time of Jesus, but today it's us. And it's a privilege to partner with Jesus.

[15 : 53] So we should evangelize because it's the most loving thing to do, but also because we're commanded to. Also, we evangelize because, it seems obvious, it has the power to save.

Paul says in Romans chapter 1 verse 16, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it has the power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes.

Not just some, for everyone who believes, it has the power to save. And if you're sitting here today, and you love Jesus, you know that's true.

You know that it saved you. Maybe you're just looking into Christian things. I want you to know, it's the power of the gospel that will save you.

It's only by faith in Jesus Christ that you'll be saved. And it will only happen when you call on the name of the Lord. I hope you're asking at this point, well, what am I even saved from if I call on the name of the Lord?

[16 : 56] The realities of hell. It's quite common these days to believe in a God of love, but not a one who judges. I don't know if you know Oprah Winfrey, that famous American talk show host.

She said this, I used to believe in a God who judges, but now I believe in a God of love. And I mean, if Oprah said it. One of the most common objections though to reform Christianity is the idea of a God who sends sinners to hell.

The world doesn't like that message. The average person, first of all, doesn't want to be told that they're a sinner because you're judging me. They definitely don't want to be told they're going to go to hell and experience eternal torment.

But the realities of hell are spoken of throughout scripture. Jesus talks of it often. And it should be part of the reason that we evangelize.

We might not know exactly what hell looks like, but we know enough for it to raise compassion in us for the people that are destined there. What's also difficult is often the people that most need the gospel look like they got it all sorted out.

[18 : 08] They might be wealthy and healthy. They might seem very happy. Why on earth do they need a message that saves them? Simple.

They're happy today, but tomorrow they might face the judge of the universe and they will be found wanting. Can the realities of hell motivate your compassion for them?

Martin Luther said, What hell is, we know not. Only this we know that there is such a sure and certain place.

You see, if we're to be convicted that we can be part of making Jesus known to the world, we need to believe that heaven and hell are real. We even need compassion for those people that seem like they've got it all sorted out because, trust me, they don't.

It might look like they do, but they don't. Everyone we meet, everyone we know is going to one of two places. Either they're going to heaven or they're going to hell.

[19 : 20] And as followers of Jesus, we have a treasure that we can share with people for free that can offer them the realities of heaven rather than hell.

And hopefully at this point you're clear on what evangelism is. It's the good news being proclaimed about the King of God's kingdom, Jesus Christ. And you know why we should evangelize?

It's the most loving thing to do. It's a command. It has the power to save and hell is real. So thirdly now, we come to the how of evangelism.

Thinking about how to evangelize is probably the most unsettling part, isn't it? We might have thoughts of memorizing scripture or knowing the gospel backwards.

We might think we need to be verbally proficient, be able to answer all types of questions. Now rather than offer you a framework of evangelism, I want to offer three basic principles that you can apply to your lives and most of you probably use these anyway.

[20 : 28] So there's nothing new to you. We evangelize by the power of prayer. That's the first principle. We evangelize by the power of prayer.

God has given us the most incredible gift of prayer. Literally as believers, we can ask him anything. We can lift up prayer to him at any time. What brings him great glory is when we pray for things that are in line with his will.

We know he wants us to make Jesus known. We also know that he knows we find it difficult. Don't we? If we're honest, we find it hard. We fear rejection or ridicule from family and friends.

We struggle to find the right words to say. So it's only right that we bring before our loving Heavenly Father our prayers. We pray to him.

We ask for opportunities to share Jesus. We pray for courage and strength. To be bold for him. We pray to have the right words at the right time in the right place.

[21 : 37] You see, when we trust God for these things, we remove the burden off our own shoulders. It's not all about us. We don't have to get everything right before we plan to evangelize.

God will be our strength. Philippians reminds us, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition and thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4 verse 6. It's also a comfort to know Jesus promises to be with us always. Second principle, we evangelize through Christ in us.

We evangelize through Christ in us. We don't do it alone. Jesus tells us, I'll be with you to the very end of the age. The truth is, in our efforts to share Jesus, it's the Lord who gives us opportunities and it's the Lord who will use us as weak as we might feel to pass on his message of salvation.

It might just be a conversation that prepares the ground. Maybe you lay the seed, maybe you water. It might be you get an opportunity to explain sin, to know what sin is, or hell, to know what hell is.

[22 : 54] Be prepared to tell someone in their darkest hour how much God loves them and why.

You see, by understanding that Christ is always with us, we can trust him, we know that he will give us the opportunities to speak.

He will give us the power to say the right words. One common mistake, and it's easy to make, is to think that sharing Jesus must be on a certain day, at a certain time, in a certain way.

But I'm convinced that the third principle, we can evangelize by our Christian living. We can evangelize by our Christian living.

We actually live out our faith, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. We're actually evangelizing now, all the time. By our interactions at work, we can model Jesus.

Colossians 4, verse 5 to 6 say, be wise in the way you act towards outsiders. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversations always be full of grace, season with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[24 : 05] By the way we do our work, we meet our deadlines, we arrive at meetings prepared, the way we speak to our colleagues, maybe the way we serve them, make them a cup of coffee or tea.

At home, we speak to our spouses. How do we do that? How do we sound when we speak to our spouses or to our children? What about at the school gates or when we put out the rubbish?

We can evangelize in those moments. Now, I'm not suggesting you put the rubbish out and be late for work by having a two-hour conversation, but it's just the way you greet people.

Our whole lives are the best evangelism opportunities we can ever have. There's this guy in our neighborhood, a young guy, and he rides around on this dirt bike.

I also ride, but this guy's pretty wild. And I've seen him quite a few times and I got into a conversation with him one day when I was fixing my bike on the driveway. And we got talking about what I do, which, I mean, it's easy.

[25 : 07] I'm a pastor. So I invited him to come along to church. Even though he hasn't come, just by inviting him, I've shown him that church isn't just for Christians.

Do you see that? I've said, come along. Come and check out church. And the way has now been opened to have a gospel conversation with him. In fact, it's often when we're not trying to evangelize, we're the most authentic witnesses.

Now, there's nothing wrong with having a strategy and a plan for evangelism. It's good. I do it. It's right. And you must go. But there's something amazing when we combine the power of prayer, the Holy Spirit in us, who guides and leads us, and a true, authentic life lived for Christ.

when you get that combination, we're like the city on the hill. Our faith can't be hidden. It overflows from us in everything we do.

It permeates all that we are. The truth is, all of us have many opportunities to witness Christ in our everyday life. But often, fear cripples us.

[26 : 22] Or the thought of rejection keeps us mute. You know the time where you walk away from someone and you think, I just said something about Jesus.

But you didn't. Yeah, I know in a recent survey by Tom Rainer, who's an American author and researcher, how about these for statistics? Only 2% of Christians have invited non-Christians to church or a church event in the last year.

2%. 82% of an unchurched people group said they were likely to accept an invitation to go to church. 82%.

I think this was in America in the Bible Belt, but okay. There's a survey from our local area, 15,000 adults who are canvassed.

56% said they would accept an invite to church if it was from a friend, a neighbor, or a family member. I think we have so many untapped gospel opportunities right on our doorstep.

[27 : 31] But we've got to train ourselves to see them. We have to consciously see life through gospel lenses. Imagine in this church if everyone invited one person to church a month for a whole year.

Just one person. Maybe not everyone would come, but every single person invited one person to church. What about your hot dog thing, your quiz night with Brewers Rolls?

Invite one. If everyone invited one person, imagine what could happen. potentially another soul saved. I'm convicted that when we put all these things together, we can be so effective for the gospel.

By understanding that evangelism is about proclaiming Jesus the king of God's kingdom, we talk about him in all situations. Because to share him is the most loving thing to do.

Why? Because it has the power to save. The story of John Harper sounds so dramatic, doesn't it? Facing death, in the middle of the ocean, doing all he could to share Jesus.

[28 : 47] But you know what? He was just an ordinary man in an unusual situation that God used in a supernatural way. And while we might never find ourselves in a situation where we can give our life jackets to someone, help save some drowning people, we can push through our fears.

And we can do everything possible to make Jesus known every day. In small ways, in big ways, in dramatic ways. While we have breath, we can live for Christ and make him known however, wherever, and whenever we can.

because the command to do so is the most loving thing we can ever do. For God so loved the world, he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

It's John 3.16. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the gift of your word. We thank you that you have chosen to partner with us.

We know we're weak, Lord, we know we struggle to find the right words, but we ask that you would be with us, be in us, as we evangelize. We ask this not for our sakes, Lord, but for yours.

[30 : 15] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.