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LESSON 1

What Is Evangelism?

SINCE PERSONAL EVANGELISM is a department of evangelism, our first inquiry must be in the more general field.

A. ETYMOLOGY OF WORD EVANGELISM.

The word comes from the Greek through the Latin. The Latin word is *evangelium*, derived from two Greek words—*eu*, meaning “well,” and *aggelos* (pronounced *angelos*), meaning “messenger.”

1. *Use of Word Aggelos.*

From the latter, as is quite apparent, we have our word *angel*. It is a common word in the New Testament, and its usages are varied and of great interest.

a) It is used of angels of God, heavenly beings of a high, spiritual order.¹

b) It is used of fallen angels, heavenly beings who followed Satan in his rebellion, and who still oppose the kingdom and will of God.²

c) It is used of men, as John the Baptist,³ John's messengers to Jesus,⁴ those whom Jesus sent before Him on the way to Jerusalem,⁵ the spies whom Rahab hid,⁶ and the pastors

¹Matt. 1:20; 4:11; Luke 2:9-15; Heb. 1:4-7, 13, 14.

²Matt. 25:41; I Cor. 6:3; II Peter 2:4; Jude 6.

³Matt. 11:10.

⁴Luke 7:24.

⁵Luke 9:52.

⁶James 2:25.

of churches.⁷ This last is disputed by some, but the writer gives his opinion.

d) It is used of the spirits of men.⁸

e) It is used of the Lord Jesus.⁹

f) It is used of Paul's "thorn in the flesh," which he calls "the messenger of Satan."¹⁰

2. Meaning of Word Messenger.

A messenger is a bearer of a message. The message may be one of joy or of sorrow. That nature of the message does not affect the case. As a messenger, he is to give the message, good or bad.

But the Greeks were as eager for good tidings as anyone else, and they introduced the prefix *eu* to distinguish the bearing of a good message from the less pleasant duties of the messenger. Thus *euaggelidzo* meant "to bear a good message," "to tell glad tidings." By turning the *u* in *eu* into a *v*, as in the Latin *evangelium*, we have evangelize, the act of telling good news; evangelist, the one who bears good news; evangelism, the whole process of telling good news, and so on.

Very simply, then, our excursion into the etymology of the word tells us that evangelism is the telling of good news. As far as the word itself goes, it may be any kind of good news. In this primary sense, telling a student that he has earned an A grade, or telling a nervous young husband that his wife has been safely delivered of a son is evangelism.

Our word, however, has come to have a more specialized sense. We think of evangelism in terms of a specific body of good news, which we call *the Gospel*.

⁷Rev. 1:20.

⁸Acts 12:15.

⁹Rev. 8:3-5.

¹⁰II Cor. 12:7.

B. DEFINITION OF GOSPEL.

In the next lesson we shall study the content of the Gospel. For now, think of the wonderful meaning of the word itself. It comes down to us from the Anglo-Saxon *godspell*, which signifies *God's spell* (story), or *good spell*. The Gospel is God's good news for needy men. Evangelism, as we understand it, then, is the telling of God's good news, or the Gospel.

We must still more closely define our subject. The Gospel is a vast theme, and includes all that God does for men within the whole scheme of redemption. The story of how God saves sinners and brings them into right relation with Himself is Gospel. God's method of perfecting saints and at last presenting them "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy"¹¹ is Gospel. The message of the blessed hope is Gospel. How God turns our trials, toils, and temptations into "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"¹² is Gospel.

C. SPECIFIC DEFINITION OF EVANGELISM.

According to our definition so far, the telling of any part of all this good news would be evangelism. However, we live in the days of specialization, and we generally restrict our use of the word *evangelism* to the telling of that portion of the Gospel which has particular reference to the unsaved. We go further. Not any kind of telling is evangelism. One might recite the Gospel in unbelief, in mockery, or as an academic diversion, and, while God might even use that to awaken and enlighten a needy soul, we could hardly call it evangelism. Here I should like to borrow a phrase from the

¹¹Jude 24.

¹²II Cor. 4:17.

Roman Catholics. In the Roman Church grace is bestowed by means of the sacraments, but in order for the grace to be granted, the priest must administer the sacrament "with intention." This phrase, *with intention*, runs through much of the Roman system. We can use it here. That only is true evangelism which presents the good news of God "with intention." To state it specifically, evangelism is the telling of the Gospel to sinners with intent to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ.

Evangelism is not everyone's job. It is the work only of those who have themselves been evangelized, and who have, by the grace of God, been joined to the company of the redeemed. The redeemed are a company, a Body, the Church. Evangelism is the work of the Church. When evangelism is carried on in complete detachment from the Body, it tends to degenerate into an unwholesome separatism. It is as members of the Body that we receive the life of the Head, and it is as members of the Body that we serve the Head.

So we arrive at our final definition. *Evangelism is the activity of the Church in telling the Gospel to sinners with intent to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ.*

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. What is the etymology of the word *evangelism*?
2. In what senses is the word *aggelos* used in the New Testament? Give examples.
3. Give the simplest meaning of the word *evangelism*, derived from its etymology.
4. What is the derivation of the word *Gospel*?
5. Give a complete definition of *evangelism*.

LESSON 2

The Message of Evangelism

GOOD NEWS is good in measure as it answers a bad situation. If I were a millionaire, and were told that a legacy of a thousand dollars had been left to me, I should probably smile an amused smile. But if I were six months behind in my rent, having no resources upon which to draw, and had just received eviction notice, the same piece of news would really be good news.

The Gospel is good news, because it answers a bad situation, and we cannot understand or appreciate the Gospel apart from the background of need which it meets. We must look, then, at the condition of man which called for God's saving intervention, and into which we must interject the good news.

A. MAN'S NEED OF SALVATION.

1. *The Guilt of Man.*

"All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."¹ "There is none that doeth good, no, not one."² "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."³

Wrongdoing in man involves guilt, for man is a moral agent. Sins are not just mistakes. They are not a moral necessity. They are culpable infractions of the law of God,

¹Rom. 3:23.

²Ps. 14:3.

³Eccles. 7:20.

and the stigma of guilt fastens upon every man for all his sins.

2. *The Depravity of Man.*

We cannot go into this as we would in a textbook of theology, but a few Scriptures will make clear that we are sinners, not only in the sense of having sinned, but also in the sense of being sinful creatures, having a nature that turns almost instinctively to evil.

Concerning the generation that lived immediately preceding the Flood, we read: "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Our Lord Himself has described the human heart: "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." That is not a pretty picture. The first chapter of Romans contains such a description of the state of man away from God that it is enough to make us tremble.* I once heard a missionary tell how he had read this portion of Scripture to a group in China. One Chinese rose up and said in effect: "You are not reading that from your sacred book. Someone has told you all about us in this village, and you have come here to insult us by calling to mind all our sins." The mirror of the Word was well polished that day!

This depravity of man does not mean that every man is as bad as he can be, or that every man has committed all the sins in the catalogue. It does mean that every man has this sin nature in him, and that every man carries in his sin-bent heart the seeds of all manner of sin. Of course, some are

*Gen. 6:5.

*Mark 7:21, 22.

*Rom. 1:21-32.

restrained by social custom, by religious training, by ethical principles, by gracious influences of one kind or another from engaging in the grosser acts, but no man can say that there is any act of sin which he is incapable of committing.

3. *The Alienation of Man.*

As an outcome of the two foregoing conditions, man is alienated from God.

This alienation is two-sided. It arises out of the sinner's attitude to God, and God's attitude to the sinner.

a) Paul speaks of our unregenerate state as "when we were enemies," and describes us as "you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works"^{*} James speaks of the world as the enemy of God, so that "whosoever . . . will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God,"^{**} and that certainly includes all the unsaved.

It is true that men of the world often show a certain respect for God. They are moral men, who would not speak blasphemously of God. They will even mention God in public addresses and appeal to Him in the righteous causes which they have espoused. But this is respect at a distance. Let God draw near, and they will be uncomfortable. Let Him put His finger on their affairs, and their resentment and rebellion will quickly appear. So long as God "stays in His place" they will nod acknowledgment of Him, but let Him not touch their personal liberty!

b) The other side of the alienation is God's attitude to the sinner, so long as he abides in his sin. However men may reason, we cannot escape the awful reality of the wrath of God in the Bible. It is impossible for the infinitely

^{*}Rom. 5:10.

^{**}Col. 1:21.

^{*}James 4:4.

holy God to be complacent in the presence of evil. He must express His utter abhorrence of it. The man in sin cannot stand before God. He is barred from His presence. He is under His wrath.

James Denny¹⁰ has pointed out three expressions of the wrath of God as given in the New Testament.

(1) Three times in the first chapter of Romans the phrase occurs, "God gave them up."¹¹ This refers to a spiritual law, that when men deliberately choose evil, that evil is permitted to come to its full fruition. The operation of this law is an act of God, an expression of His wrath. Men who are given up to uncleanness, to shameful passions, to a reprobate mind are suffering the natural fruit of their own ways, but are in that also enduring the wrath of God.

(2) In the last verse of the same chapter, the apostle tells us that those who engage in such practices as he has listed in the previous verses know very well that they are wrong, and that God's judgment against them is death. This is the witness of the conscience to the wrath of God. Thus sinners carry around with them this sense of judgment. They are living consciously under the wrath of God. They may stifle it, and seek to suppress it by denial of God or by further plunging into evil, but it is still there.

(3) Finally there is "the wrath to come," the day of judgment, when men will be brought to final account, and the wrath of God will inflict the sentence of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord"¹² on all who have continued in their sin.

4. *The Judgment of Man.*

This has been touched on in Denny's third point regard-

¹⁰James Denny, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 144.

¹¹Rom. 1:24, 26, 28.

¹²II Thess. 1:9.

ing the wrath of God. It is sometimes forgotten that we belong to a condemned race. Adam was at first in a state of probation, until he sinned. We are not in a state of probation. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."¹³ We are a race of sinners, condemned already. The judgment of the last day is not to determine where we shall spend eternity (on the basis of the balance between our good deeds and our bad deeds). That judgment is for universal demonstration of the righteousness of God, and for the carrying out of the sentence decreed. The righteous, the redeemed through faith in Jesus, will not come into judgment,¹⁴ because of the great settlement made at Calvary.

5. *The Helplessness of Man.*

Not only is man in a state of guilt, but he can do nothing to cancel his guilt. Not only is he in a state of depravity, but he can do nothing to recover his unfallen nature. Not only is he in a state of alienation, but he can do nothing to effect reconciliation. Not only is he in a state of judgment, but he can do nothing to avert the judgment. If his desperate plight is ever to be alleviated, it must be through a sovereign, gracious act of God.¹⁵

B. GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE NEED.

Now the message of evangelism is that God has acted to reverse this fearful condition, that He has provided, and is now offering, a great and full and free salvation.

1. The fountain of this salvation is the love of God.¹⁶ To some the love of God and the wrath of God may seem in-

¹³Rom. 5:12.

¹⁴John 5:24.

¹⁵Rom. 5:6, 16.

¹⁶John 3:16; Rom. 5:8.

compatible, but this is not so when we know the true nature of both. The love of God is not soft sentimentalism, neither is the wrath of God vindictive ire. The wrath of God may be defined as the necessary reaction of holiness to all moral evil, issuing in righteous judgment. His love moves Him to deal with sin in such a manner that He can righteously forgive the sinner. Both His love and His wrath are holy, pure, noble, and strong. They burn with the same intensity, and are indeed part of each other. They could not exist without each other. They are two expressions of the same holy passion.

2. The Mediator of this salvation is the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷ He it was who became incarnate, and as the God-man, wrought for God and man in the sacrifice of Himself, thus obtaining eternal redemption.¹⁸ He it is who appears before the face of God for us, by whom alone we draw nigh to God. God is our Saviour, but all the blessings of salvation are bestowed "through Jesus Christ our Saviour."¹⁹ There is no other way.

3. The content of this salvation is manifold. There is in it an adequate answer to the entire lost condition of man.

a) *To Meet Our Guilt There Is Forgiveness,²⁰ Cleansing,²¹ and Justification.*²²

The forgiveness secures our restoration to the place of favor; the cleansing takes away the defilement; and the justification gives us a positive standing in righteousness before Him. So our guilt is thoroughly dealt with.

b) *To Meet Our Depravity There Is Regeneration.*²³

¹⁷I Tim. 2:5; Heb. 12:24; John 14:6; Acts 4:12.

¹⁸Heb. 9:12.

¹⁹Titus 3:5, 8.

²⁰Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; I John 2:12; Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18.

²¹Isa. 1:18; I John 1:7; Rev. 7:14.

²²Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:24; 8:30; Titus 3:7.

²³John 3:6, 7; I Peter 1:22, 23; II Cor. 5:17; John 1:12, 13.

Regeneration means a new birth, from above, of God, making us new creatures, possessors of a new nature "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."¹⁴ While this does not take away our old nature, it establishes an effectual counteraction to it. Then, since regeneration is accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we have the very power of God to render the old nature ineffectual and the new nature effectual. Thus our reason, our emotions, and our will are all delivered from the bondage of the depraved nature, and set free to serve God.

c) *To Meet Our Alienation There Is Reconciliation.*¹⁵

By the cross of Christ, God is placed in a new situation with regard to the sinner. He is now free to receive the sinner, not in his sin, but loosed from it. The sinner who will heed the exhortation, "Be ye reconciled to God,"¹⁶ dropping his sword of rebellion and turning in penitence to the Saviour, will find the arms of God open to receive him into the full privileges of sonship.

d) *To Meet Our State of Judgment There Is the Gift of Eternal Life.*¹⁷

Since the judgment is death, eternal life is its complete reversal. Being now "in Christ," the believer "shall not come into condemnation [judgment]; but is passed from death unto life."¹⁸

4. The divine method of salvation is threefold:

a) *By Grace.*¹⁹

¹⁴Eph. 4:24.

¹⁵Col. 1:19-22; Eph. 2:13-18; Rom. 5:10, 11.

¹⁶II Cor. 5:20.

¹⁷John 3:14-16; 10:27, 28; I John 5:11, 12.

¹⁸John 5:24.

¹⁹Eph. 2:8, 9; Titus 2:11; 3:4-7; Rom. 3:24.

This makes it a sovereign act of God, altogether apart from human merit or works.

b) *By Blood.*¹⁰

This signifies the sacrifice of Christ, His life given as an atonement for sin. Grace without blood would mean collapse of all moral values.

c) *By Faith.*¹¹

Faith is not a meritorious act which makes the sinner worthy of salvation, but a simple acceptance of the provided redemption. It involves repentance, for the very nature of salvation is such that an impenitent sinner cannot receive it.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. List five aspects of man's condition calling for God's intervention in salvation.
2. State clearly the meaning of depravity as applied to the human race.
3. What are the two aspects of alienation as between man and God?
4. What are the three expressions of the wrath of God revealed in the New Testament? Give references
5. What particular state of man is met by (a) forgiveness? (b) regeneration? (c) reconciliation? (d) eternal life?
6. In three brief phrases describe God's method of salvation.

¹⁰Rom. 5:9; Rev. 1:5, 6; I Peter 1:18, 19.

¹¹Rom. 5:1; John 20:31; Acts 20:21.