

Evangelism II

by Dana Congdon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of evangelism and the role of the Lord's people in sharing the Gospel with others.

Duration: 58:36

Scripture: Psalm 51:10

Topics: "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a testimony of a woman who was saved while attending a worship service. Despite the distractions and preoccupations of the people around her, she saw the Lord and accepted Him as her Savior. The speaker emphasizes the importance of believers being preoccupied with Christ and allowing Him to work through them to share the gospel. He challenges the congregation to pray and ask the Lord if there is someone they should invite to hear the gospel. The speaker also highlights the need to understand that the kingdom of God is a spiritual dimension that is accessible to all, and that preaching the gospel is about bringing people into an awareness of this kingdom.

Transcript

I'd like to introduce the speaker this morning. He's Dana Congdon from New York. Hi, I'm Dana Congdon from New York.

Nice to be down here in your spring weather. It's much warmer down here than we're having up in New York right now. And I'm glad to be with you to share on this matter of the gospel.

Last night I shared, and of course I think I don't need to say, that outreach, evangelism, the gospel needs to be held in context. There are many things the Lord's doing in this day. He's building his church.

He is bringing his people to a real understanding of himself. He's recovering a lot of stuff that's been lost over the years. And evangelism fits in as one of the notches in the whole thing.

You know, it's hard to hold everything in balance. But as we follow the Lord, he seems to bring us through seasons of emphasis. There are times where he emphasizes relationships, and times when he emphasizes prayer, and all of these things are part of our life together, and yet he brings us through seasons.

I trust that your exercising spiritually in these recent days over this matter of the gospel and of outreach is an indication that the Lord is wanting you to enter into a season of harvest for his sake. It's an act of worship to evangelize. Just as surely as it's an act of worship to raise our hands and thank the Lord for what he's done for us.

It's an act of worship to be obedient to the Lord. I remember a stunning meeting that I was privileged to be at one time. There was a group of people who were going to an assembly in such and such a town up on Long Island, and yet they lived over here about 15 miles away.

About 20 or so people who were meeting over here, though they lived about 15 miles away. And they said, how about if we have a meeting over where we live? So I said, sure, let's rent out a hall or something, and let's have a gospel meeting. So we set up a series of six meetings on Sunday nights.

Six Sunday nights in a row just for the gospel over at this other area here. We went over there, and these 20 folks had been praying, and the doors opened, and in came 150 people. And so many of them knew the Lord, and a number of them didn't know the Lord.

But I remember the first night we got together. And this was early in the 1970s, probably 1973. Worship was an experience unknown to many Christians.

And we just began to sing, you know what I'm saying, worship in the choruses and just kind of free worship form. So we began to sing some choruses like Great is the Lord. You know, that song was very popular back then, Thy Loving Kindness.

We ran through about 10 or 12 of those choruses straight. And I remember the folks just had their hands raised, and we were singing, I think, Hallelujah, Hallelujah. And I looked down, and there was a lady bawling out in the second row.

And she was just crying so loud that eventually everybody noticed. I mean, she just was letting all the stops out. And so there was a ruckus there.

Well, you know what the guys are doing who are ministering do. They pretend nothing's happening. So I went right along.

Meanwhile, a couple of people are buzzing over there with this girl. Well, this lady, a lady in her late 20s, got soundly saved that day. She was a Mormon.

But that day found the Lord. And her testimony was, when the saints were worshiping, I saw the Lord. What else could I do? Isn't it amazing? I mean, the Lord's tool of evangelism is this.

The Lord's people being preoccupied with Christ. Now, last night I shared a little bit of the Gospel. And my hope is just simply that as we understand again the Gospels and see Jesus of the Gospels, who is the content of the Gospel and also the preacher of the Gospel, that somehow he'll infect us in such a way that we will be the Gospel and preach the Gospel.

People can see Jesus and us as we relate these things. And it isn't really a matter of making people aware. You know, let me put it this way.

Somebody asked me after the meeting last night, well, what did you exactly mean about the Gospel of the Kingdom? Obviously, once again, Dana was just clear as anything. This person said, what did you say?

Anyway, I think that the Gospel of the Kingdom simply put is this. I don't know how effective it is when we take somebody here who already knows that they're a sinner, and we focus them on this world and say, now, look, you're not making it in this world and you're a sinner and you need Jesus.

Well, they're saying, well, yeah, I can argue with that. But the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom is such that you preach Christ and the reality of this unseen Kingdom in such a way that that becomes the reality that they see. It isn't so much an awareness of this life as an awareness of that dimension that is here, near, and needs to be entered into through repentance and faith.

And it isn't a question of focusing somebody's life upon themselves. You know, are you doing lousy? Yeah, I know. It's a question of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom in such a way that people see the King.

And one day, as that old chorus says, when you turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, the things of earth grow strangely dim because there's an awareness of this Kingdom. I don't know if that speaks to you, but all of us in our experience, as a Christian at times, are aware of this duality that we live in. We live in this world.

And we can worship this morning and some of you could be looking at your shoes and, oh man, they need polishing and, you know, and you're aware of this world and then something is said, perhaps the testimonies that are spoken this morning just brings us into another realm. And there we are. Well, that's the Kingdom.

That's what meaning really is. That's what life really is. It isn't my shoe polish.

And yet, in five minutes, we can slip right back. One kid squawks and... back into this real world. Well, there we are living in between.

But I believe preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom is to bring people into an awareness of this Kingdom. That's what John the Baptist had an anointing to do. He made these Jewish people realize that the Kingdom of God was not that earthly place called Israel where they all were dwelling.

That's not the Kingdom of God. It was something that was there, but it was beyond them. It was another realm, but it was right there on top of them and it was a spiritual dimension that they need to open their eyes to.

And this is the Gospel that we need to preach today. No matter what secular man may say, God is as near as their heart and their mouth. There's a whole dimension, a dimension of spiritual beings that God wants to make us aware of as we enter in and recognize Jesus as the King.

Well, anyway, that's sort of what I shared last night so now you don't need the tape. Now, another thing that I shared last night was the practical end of what we're trying to do. Now, there's a two-fold end to my being here in these couple of weeks and it's simply this.

First of all, as it says at the end of Acts chapter 2, And the Lord added daily to the church such as were being saved. It's my hope that the church can engage in normal evangelism. What is normal evangelism? It isn't having a revival meeting every week or drumming people up with special tents and all this kind of stuff.

The normal evangelism of the church is something that's carried on through our daily lives and the Lord adds daily to the church such as those who he's appointed to be saved. But it involves a sensitivity on our part to the Lord leading us to people. And we're not always so good at this sensitivity and I'll get into that a little bit today.

We tend to become passive and we're not engaging in normal evangelism. But here's what I'm talking about normal evangelism. I think it would be great.

I think it would be wonderful. Matter of fact, it would be such an influx of life in the church if this one thing happened. People are afraid of witnessing and evangelism basically because they envision themselves always every Saturday having to stand outside the supermarket and preach.

But really, daily evangelism, life without evangelism in the church is simply this. If you, through your faithfulness, can make contact with one person who's not a Christian this year, 1986, the whole year. Get to know them.

Become long-suffering friends of theirs. Help them understand the gospel. Pray with them through their problems.

And somehow be an instrument along the chain of several instruments that God will use to bring them to the Lord. If you could just do that with one person this year, and let's say only one-third of those people actually ended up coming to this particular fellowship upon their salvation, there'd be an increase of 100 people. If we could just be open to the Lord and say, Lord, is there somebody you want me to initiate a relationship with? Somebody where I work? Somebody in my neighborhood? Forget your whole neighborhood.

You know, we're always thinking, well, I've got to reach out to 25 people. It's so large we never get to it. How about one person, Lord? Just one person.

Pray for the one person. Work with the one person. Help the one that God seems to lead you to.

Maybe He'll lead you to two or three. If maybe one of them came to the Lord this year, and if everybody were doing this kind of thing, the church would be multiplying. Now, we're not out for numbers.

And as a matter of fact, once there's a harvest, God often just cuts the thing right off so there can be some consolidation and growth. You know, a season of harvest does not go on forever. But the Lord gathers in a bunch.

And then He works them and incorporates them into the body of Christ. Well, now, may this be a season of harvest here in our midst. And may the Lord do His work in your heart as well.

Next Sunday morning, we're going to have a gospel meeting. From 10 to 11. It's going to be a one-hour meeting.

A blessing for many in itself. We're just going to sing a couple of songs. Amazing Grace has got the whole world in His hands.

Songs that hopefully any person who's not a Christian would probably know. We'll have two testimonies. May they be a blessing that these testimonies were this morning.

We'll have a special music. I'll get up with my guitar and sing a song. Then I'll preach a short gospel.

Then we'll have a response time. That's it. Simple.

But the Spirit of God will be here in a mighty way. And your involvement is really the key. Now, next Saturday night, I'll tell you why your involvement will be a double key.

But just today, I'll give you one shot. I would like to challenge you, everybody here, to go before the Lord before this day is out and simply say this, Lord, is there someone you want me to bring next Sunday morning? Now, I believe everybody here can bring somebody who needs to hear the gospel next Sunday. But I know everybody is chicken.

Everybody thinks somebody else will do it. Everybody else thinks, well, somebody who's not as busy as I am. Or somebody who has more contact with the world.

You know me, I stay at home all day, I don't know. Forget all that stuff. All I say is, you go before the Lord and say, now, Lord, is there someone? And if someone comes to your mind, then you pray.

And you ask. And you bring them. And you sit with them.

Now, when people are truly willing, it's amazing the doors that open up. If you're not willing, you say, now, Lord, is there somebody? And your heart's not willing, nobody's going to come to your mind. Well, maybe somebody will.

But you won't hear it. You'll say, that's impossible. I, uncle, could never get saved.

But if you will just go before the Lord and say, now, Lord, is there someone? And your heart is open, then listen. And then obey. And it would be a marvelous thing if we could come together next Sunday morning and just absolutely have this place packed out half and half.

Half Christians and believers. Half guests and secrets. God would move in a mighty way.

We could play one chord on the piano and give an invitation. Somebody would respond. Because the Spirit of God would be here working.

Now, this Wednesday night at prayer meeting, I've suggested that we actually have a chalkboard up here next Wednesday night and write the names of people we're praying for and asking to come. Now, listen. I know that you ask some people and they'll say yes.

But why I suggest you bring them is because, really, it's true. Eighty percent of the people who say they come won't. The devil will snag them up.

But if you say I'll be by Sunday morning at 9.30, it's kind of hard to call you up and say, well, I don't want to come because my shoes aren't shined. So, people are more likely to come if you're going to pick them up. So, now, this is really spiritual warfare behind all this activity.

And I hope you'll engage in it with me. And we'll have a gospel meeting next Sunday. It'll just be a real moving of God.

Now, in 2 Timothy 4, Paul says to young Timothy, 2 Timothy 4, verse 5, But you, Timothy, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. Now, the question cannot be

answered whether Timothy was actually an evangelist by calling, but as a responsible brother and a servant of the Lord in the church, Paul is exhorting him to do the work of an evangelist. Now, my exhortation to all of us is to do the work of an evangelist.

Well, who is an evangelist, anyway? You know, this person, an evangelist, is not mentioned very often in the Scriptures. In Ephesians 4.11, in the list of ministries, you have apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Evangelist is mentioned there.

In Acts chapter 21, Philip is mentioned and called an evangelist. He is the only one specifically called an evangelist. And then in 2 Timothy chapter 4, Timothy is exhorted to do the work of an evangelist.

And that's it. Not much about evangelism in the book of Acts. But we can see when we look at Philip's life, and we can see by some of the things the Scriptures imply, and we can see, in fact, in experience, there are some signs that somebody is an evangelist.

Now, do you know if you're an evangelist? Probably, if there are 200 people here this morning, there are some evangelists. Now, we have to get over the stereotypes that we tend to form in our lives of who an evangelist is. You know, Billy Graham, somebody like that.

Because God has all kinds of unique and different styles of evangelism. And he calls people in the body of Christ to serve in this ministry of evangelism. Who is an evangelist? A couple of simple characteristics, just by way of reference.

An evangelist is somebody who sees a revelation of the Lord of the Harvest. Now, they don't just see lost souls. What they actually do is they see the Lord of the Harvest.

And what does the Lord of the Harvest show them? The Lord of the Harvest shows an evangelist that the fields are white on the harvest. Do you remember that story from John chapter 4? Where the disciples came back and after Jesus' interview with the woman at the well, the woman ran back into town. The disciples saw Jesus and began to talk to Him.

And Jesus said, Now, look. Look out here at the fields. Don't tell me that there's still a couple of months before the harvest time.

I say to you, the fields are now white on the harvest. Now, what was the disciples' problem that they'd look out on the fields and say they're not ripe yet? Well, Jesus may in fact have been pointing to the actual fields out there which weren't ripe for harvest yet. But He was making a parable and He was saying this.

Listen, disciples. Every time we pass through Samaria, you guys have the idea that nobody here is ready to get saved. You think, Not the people in Richmond.

They're just not ready. They're gospel hardened. These folks have heard too much on the radio and seen too much on television.

We need to go up to New York. That's where the harvest is ripe. But down in Richmond, it's just not ready.

Give it three or four months. Give us some bad times, some hard times. Let some more preachers leave or quit or different problems come up.

Then maybe people here will be rich and ripe, ready for harvest. Jesus knew the Lord of the harvest and it gave Him different eyesight. When Jesus looked out at the Samaritans, He said, You know, you guys don't even realize it but these folks are ripe for the pit.

There's a difference between Jesus' perspective and the disciples' perspective because the disciples looked at men after the flesh and saw a bunch of compromised Jews, who Samaritans were. They weren't ready. Jesus looked beyond the facade and He saw some hungry people there and said, These folks are ripe.

And so it is with an evangelist. An evangelist has seen the Lord of the harvest in such a way that he says, Look, the fields are ripe. The fields are ripe.

And they're off and are harping. We need to reach out. The fields are ripe.

And everybody says, No, no, another three or four months. An evangelist sees that the fields are ripe and the harvest. An evangelist also has a gift.

Some gift that enables them to contact the world. Now, the gift varies. I think sometimes the best evangelists I know, their gift is a big ear.

They are listeners. They listen when people talk and they respond with a discernment that comes from listening to the Lord and listening to somebody talk. While most of us go through the workday and our work associates are sending off little signals of despair and hopelessness and sinfulness and guiltiness, we're so busy in our own lives we're not even hearing what's going on.

But an evangelist picks up and the Lord says, That person, that person right there. And they listen to people and half the time what will bring somebody to the Lord is somebody who cares and listens and shares the truth with them. And that's a gift.

That is contact. And other people have a gift of wise counsel, which I won't go into, but I'll just leave it like that. And some people have more outward gifts.

Some people have a way of disarming people when they share the gospel. I'll never forget a summer that I spent. I went out a number of times with Arthur Blessed in the streets of New York City.

This guy could disarm anybody. He didn't take offense the way he shared the gospel, but he'd stop everybody on the street and ask them if they knew Jesus. And he had such a way.

I remember I was with him one time two o'clock in the morning there on Times Square and he asked somebody if they knew the Lord. The guy pulled a knife out that was that big. Arthur didn't bat an eye.

He said, oh, he says, Jesus loves you. He says, you don't need that. Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers.

The guy put the knife away. And then he talked to them about Jesus. The guy listened.

I mean, there was a gift there. He had a personal gift of contact with people. Chris, then I climbed down the lamppost and we went on to the next person.

Some people the Lord uses with more spectacular gifts, you might say. The gift of healing is often used in evangelism. You find it in the book of Acts and it's still true today.

As I was sharing with you last night, we have some Tuesday night meetings, gospel meetings. I don't consider myself a healer by any means. I think Jesus is the healer.

But we gave an invitation at the end of the meeting the very first Tuesday night and said, now who here really feels like God could heal you and you need that? About ten people came up and some of them got healed that night. And you know why? It's not because I had some kind of special thing going. It's just that Jesus wanted to attest to the gospel that had been preached that night.

He sent the Holy Spirit behind to show these people this is true. And my particular gift is this. I mean, I know what my gift is in this matter of evangelism.

Usually what I do is I can take my guitar and sing and people open up. Then I share the gospel. Now, that's the way I do it.

When I get a chance, that's what I'll do next Sunday morning. And that's what I do up in New York. I open it up with the guitar and then I give them the gospel.

The old G and G. Guitar and gospel. That's the way I do it. Everybody has some different way.

But an evangelist has some kind of point of contact. There's a special gift that they have that God uses. And then an evangelist is one of those guys who's brave enough to actually pull in the net.

There's a lot of folks who witness but they just can't draw the net. They just can't say, Would you like to pray? They just can't say it. They say, Can I take you over to Rob's house? You know, I mean, they don't know.

But there's always some guy who's willing to pull in the net and say, Now, buddy, are you ready to get serious with God? Let's pray. I pull in the net sometimes before folks are ready to become Christians. And I pull in the net with folks and I pray with them.

And I get them to pray before they're even Christians. I get them to pray and say, Well, now God, if you're real, prove yourself to me. All kinds of things like that.

I get people to pray about their jobs. You know, because I find that I just have that enabling. I can ask people this question that ties most people's tongues up.

So an evangelist, who knows? You can't define evangelist other than that because there are all kinds of strange characters evangelists. Counselors, listeners, preachers, singers, one-on-one people. I mean, you know, all kinds of different fishermen.

Some people use a one little hook with a worm on it. Some folks just throw a whole net out. Different kinds of fishermen.

But that's the way God is. So don't stereotype evangelists, you see. Now, here's my question.

Are you one? How many evangelists have we got here this morning? What do you think? Do you think maybe we've got 10 here this morning? It looks like we're almost 200. Do you think there's 10, 5 percent of

evangelists? Do I hear 11? Well, who knows? Okay, so there we are, you see. It's interesting how nobody's ever an evangelist.

Who wants to be that? A teacher. Some folks will almost admit they have a teaching ministry. But forget apostles.

You know, they went out with the New Testament. And I guess evangelists did too. Is that right? Well, apostles didn't go out with the end of the New Testament canon and neither did they have evangelists.

They're still around. And who cares about the name? We need folks who function. But we've got to take this seriously.

You know, there's some of you here who are hiding under bushels. There are evangelists. I'll bet you.

Well, anyway. So, if there's no evangelists willing to come out here, now let me ask you another question. How many of you are martyrs? Do I see any hands? Well, now, here's your second mistake.

You're not only willing not to admit who's the evangelist here, but you don't realize that every Christian is a martyr. This Greek word, *martyria*, from which we get the word martyr, is the word that's translated 173 times in the New Testament, witness. The Bible doesn't tell us to go out and evangelize.

It tells us to bear witness 173 times. Only some Christians are given the gift of evangelism. Every Christian is a witness.

Forget about this I'm going to go out witnessing or I will be a witness someday. You are a witness. Your only choice is whether you're a good one or a sorry one.

The moment you're a Christian, you are a witness. And that Greek word is martyr. And that word is used all the time.

Look at Acts 1.8. What is really said there? And you shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses. Martyrs unto me, both in Jerusalem and Judea and unto the other parts of the earth. You shall be witnesses.

And Peter says at the end of his sermon on the day of Pentecost, and we are witnesses of these things. In Acts 5 before the Sanhedrin, he says and we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit that God has given us. And Paul, at the end of the book of Acts as he shares his testimony of his salvation, actually says, God appointed me to bear witness of the things of Jesus.

Now there is a phrase that is used over and over and over again. And we are supposed to be martyrs. I shouldn't laugh anymore, right? Everybody here is one.

Now let's define one just a minute because it puts us all in the business of outreach. Not everybody pulls the net, but everybody should bear witness. And what is this being a martyr? There is much to say, but I think 1 John 1 is a perfect example of what it means to be a witness.

1 John 1, the opening. If we listen to this scripture and realize that it implies to our own bearing witness, we see that this has universal application for us. 1 John 1. What was from the beginning that we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands have handled concerning the word of life.

And the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness that's martyr. And proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us.

And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And right there John says this is how I bear witness. You know what a witness does? A witness simply testifies to the things that they have seen and heard and touched and handled regarding Jesus.

And brothers and sisters, God raises up evangelists and they do a special work in the church of edifying the church through this matter of the gospel. But what God really wants is for us to understand this martyring, this witness that we have to bear. The greatest influx of evangelism and salvation in the church that will ever be seen will happen the day that the saints, just the regular saints, the non-evangelist saints share with people they know the things they have seen and heard and touched and handled regarding Jesus.

It's the most powerful sermon you've ever heard. These testimonies this morning didn't teach you like that. This is a downer my message after that.

And next Sunday morning we'll have two simple testimonies. I'm telling you, it will be the most powerful moment in the meeting. Because when somebody stands up and doesn't give arguments, no great theology, no questions and answers and refutations, simply stands up and says, this is what I touched, this is what I felt, and this is what I heard from Jesus.

And this is how I responded. Boom! The Holy Spirit comes down. I bear witness with that witness, the Holy Spirit said.

But we're so reticent, you see. This is our problem. Because within that word martyr, of course you know the connotation of martyr now.

That's why you all laugh. It's somebody who lays down his life. And that's exactly what you have to do to bear witness.

1 John was written by a man who ended up on the Isle of Patmos. You know why? He says, I was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. And here's what he says in Revelation 1.9. Because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

You know what that word testimony is? Martyr. The same word. Now listen, you know what that means? I interpret it this way.

It means so much, the testimony of Jesus. Just one little angle on it. It's one thing to preach the Word of God.

Sometimes that doesn't ruffle too many feathers. A lot of folks are throwing Bible verses around. But then you preach and testify in such a way that you have felt and handled and touched God through Jesus Christ.

And suddenly the sparks fly. The devil gets angry and throws up opposition. And you're liable to get exiled.

Maybe even lay your life down. And so John found himself exiled because of this witness of Jesus. Or put it another way, when you share the Word of God and you share it about Jesus, Jesus comes behind and

testifies and makes it come alive.

And again, the devil in opposition takes note. However you want to interpret that testimony of Jesus. The power of God behind the Word of God.

And when we are martyrs, we just share with people the things we have seen and heard and touched, but we're willing to lay down our lives. Now, the problem with witnesses, it's simply that. Being willing to lay down our lives.

Now, we're all chicken. Maybe somebody isn't here, but then they're just some other kind of fowl. You ask somebody who has faithfully witnessed a thousand times and they're still chicken.

There's something about being out there on the front line speaking to unbelievers who are liable to hit you or yell at you or test you. So much laying down a life involved and you're still chicken. By the grace of God and not because I wanted to be, I've gotten railroaded into all kinds of witnessing situations.

I mean, I've been through the middle of every kind of method and way and situation and soap boxes and outdoor meetings and indoor meetings and crusades. I've been through the whole thing. And I want to tell you, I'm still chicken.

You never overcome this because you're out on the edge of the unknown with Jesus. And there's a certain brokenness that has to happen for you to be an effective witness. We all tend to stand on this thing that's called the threshold.

I like this word threshold. You know when I fell in love with this word threshold? It's when I saw the movie The Right Stuff. And Chuck Yeager was talking about breaking the sound barrier and they called that place where you break the sound barrier the threshold.

And the pilots believed that when you came to that threshold, demons in the sky grabbed hold of that plane and shook it. That's what they actually said. I mean, you know what I'm saying.

It's sort of a superstition. That's what they believed. Because they get up to that threshold and the equipment would start going crazy and the wings would fly.

You know, this is true. This is before you hit the sound barrier and break it. This experience of disorientation and dizziness happens.

And so, of course, Chuck Yeager was the first guy to break through the threshold. I like that. I liked it so much I went and looked it up in the dictionary.

You know one of the meanings of the word threshold? The actual meaning of the word threshold, one of the meanings is this. The end of the runway. Now, folks, we are the best taxiing of airplanes the world has ever known.

Rev up the engine. We're going to evangelize. Get down the runway.

Let's take it back around. I'm not sure the wind was right. We're always taxiing.

About once a year we get all hepped up about this thing. We're open. All the engines are still good.

We're ready to go. Let's witness. But the problem is our engines misfire.

You know? Because when the sisters are ready to evangelize, the brothers aren't. When the young ones are ready, the old ones aren't. When the old ones are ready, the young ones aren't.

They're always misfiring. The left wing is always dead. We've got to circle around one more time.

So God could never get a company of believers all saying we've got to... Look, our runway is like at Hong Kong. If you don't make it off the runway, you go down in the water. I'll never forget my first time flying into Hong Kong.

You just see water on either side. You don't see a runway. Then you land.

Boom. I think they must have made it on garbage, you know? Big garbage runway. You know, they just take... They open everything and they build a runway right out in the middle of the water.

I mean, if you don't make it off, bye-bye. Down you go. And there we are, thresholding as witnesses.

How do we get off? Well, it is very simply a matter of laying down our lives. Jesus said, nobody, nobody leaves house or mother or father or brothers or sisters for my sake and the Gospels for what they'll be rewarded. And that's in that context.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. I have a saying. Actually, it's not a true saying in the deepest sense because every aspect of the Christian life involves an experience of the cross to be real.

But I have a simple saying and it's this. The cross, it seems most evident in our lives at two points. When we really give ourselves to prayer and when we're willing to reach out and evangelize.

We experience the cross in prayer because we are in our closet and nobody hears or appreciates. There's no human comfort through the thing. There's a lot of toil and a lot of labor and only the Lord knows.

Many of us can't embrace that cross. It's just too costly. But when you do, the Lord really answers prayer.

The same way with witnessing. You know, we talk like we believe everything. But when you're out there on the firing line, you find out what you really believe.

It's like, you know, it's the litmus test of our faith. Hey, do you really believe God is with you when this guy is yelling at you and saying he doesn't want to hear you anymore? Or one of your own relatives and say you're never welcome back in my house if you ever talk about Jesus again. You know, it takes something.

As a matter of fact, I want to be so bold as to say though the cross is applicable to every area of our Christian life, the most obvious and contextual meaning of bearing the cross in the Gospels and in the Epistles has to do with sharing the Gospel. Paul, when he talks about his trials and tribulations, he always says that they were in reference with sharing the Gospel. He wasn't just talking about the sort of inward life of the cross.

He was saying the cross has its inward life and its crushing effect on the soul and its outward manifestation with persecutions that come from reaching out into this world. And if we internalize our interpretation of the cross to a total degree and leave off the real context of Scripture which has to do with our standing vis-a-vis the world and sharing the Gospel, then we lose something. We over-spiritualize the cross.

You know, when Paul says I've endured the cross, he says I have cuts and bruises and scars on my body from bearing the cross. And I just say well, I've had a tough time. I've been rejected by two people.

The cross is real in its inward manifestation and in its outward manifestation. Now, I would just like to share that there's two areas of this cross or self-denial that I'd just like to share on this morning. If we would be effective witnesses.

And that's really the key. I do believe that if we're faithful, the Lord will raise up some among us who are evangelists. But I just want to talk to the witnesses here this morning.

Who's that? How many of you are witnesses? Well, let's all exercise here just a little bit. Here we go. Everybody here is a Christian.

There you are. I'd just like to talk to you guys this morning. I think there's two areas of self-denial, could I say it that way, that will transform us into effective martyrs.

One, the self-denial of willingness. Willingness. Are you really willing to be a witness? Or do your excuses and your insecurities and your fear get in the way? Everybody is chicken, but it's what you do with your chickennes that makes the difference.

Can we look at the prayer of a willing witness? Psalm 51 is worth turning to, not only because it's a great psalm of repentance in the life of David, but there's also just a little patch in there of this psalm that I think speaks directly to this matter of our willingness. And Psalm 51, where David confesses his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, there's verses 10 through 13. I'd like to read those verses.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from thy presence and do not take thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.

Listen to verse 13. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways and sinners will be converted to thee. David knew very practically there were some conditions to his testimony, standing and strength and converting sinners to a holy life.

And what were these barriers that had to be cleared out of the way in order for him to be this successful witness? Create in me a clean heart, O God. There's no way we can get away from that. If we expect to be witnesses and our hearts are all fouled with duplicity, then we don't understand the secret.

Renew a steadfast spirit within me. You know, we're just all fluctuating. David says, Lord, I know that I fluctuate.

I need a steadfast spirit. A right spirit. Do not cast me away from thy presence and do not take thy Holy Spirit from me.

I'll talk about that in a minute. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. See, David knew he was chicken.

Can I put it that way? He knew that yesterday he may have been willing, but today he's not unless the Lord sustains him with a willing spirit. You understand, we do not have a willing battery that gets stored up. We have to exercise our will every day.

You know that. Many of you here, perhaps yesterday, were a spiritual giant. Today, you're Minnie Mouse.

There's no battery. You don't take it into the shop and build up the spiritual battery so that every day you wake up willing. But you grow in a Christian life to the place where you have the sensitivity to where every day you go to the Lord and say, Lord, sustain me with a willing spirit.

It's better to admit where we are with the Lord than to try to fake it. It's better to say, Lord, you know, I'll tell you the truth, I'm going to work today, but I don't really feel so hot and it's Monday after all, and I don't really feel very willing to be a witness, Lord. I mean, who wants to bother with people's lives? I can't even get my own together.

But Lord, sustain me with a willing spirit. I just say to you today, Lord, I am willing to testify the things I've seen and heard if you'll give me opportunity. There are such few saints willing to do that that whenever some saint does that, they always get opportunity.

I want to be so bold as to say, if you would be willing before God and say, God, I'm chicken, but even despite that, I'm willing, sustain me with a willing spirit, and I open up my heart for an opportunity to share the things I've seen and heard with somebody who needs to hear it this week. I'm so bold as to say, everyone who would really say that today would have an opportunity by next Sunday. That's how much God wants people who are open.

How many people are open? How many people really have their ears opened to opportunity? I mean, God's dropping clues all over the place for us to pick up on. We're going through there with our radio turned off instead of tuned in to His station. You just have to listen when you're at work.

You don't stop and buttonhole everybody. You just go through work open. And somebody, out of the clear blue, you're having coffee with, they're dropping a religious subject out of the clear blue sky.

And God says, ah! For somebody shares their discouragement with life, or their crisis at home, or their breakup or their marriage. And all of that is opportunity. Who's open? I'll tell you what, brothers and sisters, I know there are thousands of Christians in Richmond, and I'll bet you there's not hundreds that are going to be open tomorrow.

Let's talk one day at a time. Let's not talk about committing yourself to evangelism the rest of your life. Let's talk about being willing tomorrow.

And it won't happen with everybody. Not this week. Because God has His timing in everybody's life.

But if you would say, I am willing, Lord, it's amazing what happens. It's incredible. I've shared this in a number of places.

And I always get testimonies of people time after time who say, Dana, I did that. I prayed and said, Lord, the next day. College students.

When I go and share this at a college campus, watch out. The saints get dangerous. Only because God opens up opportunities.

I don't mean they ramrod their way in and start pestering people. I mean opportunities just go knocking right on their forehead. God just needs an open vessel.

And then just live your life. If you're really open and willing and say, God, I've got my antenna up to your clues, then you just live your life out. You don't think, should I witness to them? I'm on the elevator, Lord.

Which one of these four? I've got two floors to go. You don't get paranoid like every opportunity. You've got to take every situation and witness.

All you've got to do is live your life out and be aware of the fact that God may come and knock on your door and say, here is an opportunity. And if that happens to you once every two weeks, you're an open vessel. Share in those opportunities.

The prayer of a willing witness, he just broke it. A contrite spirit, Lord, that's what you respect. First of all, God, let's straighten this out.

Now, I need you to don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore the joy of my salvation. Cleanse my heart.

And give me a willing spirit. That's a dynamite witness right there. And then the other aspect of self-denial is knowing and living with an awareness of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

And whenever we talk about witnessing in the gospel, you have to talk about the Holy Spirit. Because He is the witness who is going to affirm everything that you say. And we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

And we need to know the anointing of the Holy Spirit. You know, so much witnessing that is so-called witnessing and is engineered witnessing. Well, let's put it this way.

You give two folks the Campus Crusade course on witnessing and one of them will be effective in it and one of them won't. And the difference will be the Holy Spirit. And the one who will be effective in it is just following the Holy Spirit.

They might start out with a book and chuck it out after two sentences and then just go by the Spirit. Now, we need that anointing of the Holy Spirit. You know, ladies and gentlemen, when we begin to share the gospel, all kinds of flak comes up that needs to be dealt with with power.

I mean, I'm telling you, I've been in gospel meetings where I stand up and share Jesus and demons pop out. I'm just probably literally... I remember one time I was out there with Arthur Blessed out on Times Square. He started sharing the gospel one night and a lady stood up totally demon-possessed and started talking so loud and yakking and refuting the things that were said that she totally disrupted the meeting.

And it was straight-up demonic oppression. You could see it in her eyes. You could see that she had just come under her control.

Disrupted the meeting. Now, you need spiritual resources at times like that. You can't just pack up your suitcase and say, let's go somewhere else where there's no demons.

Now, that's a reality. Now, you see, on the other side of it, I mean, there's people who go around demon-chasing. That's not what God's saying.

You don't have to give them that kind of place like there's a demon under every closet. In every closet. Under every bushel.

There's a church up in New York that I know they're not going to last too long. The ushers wear these big badges. And this is the truth.

They say, I'm a demon-chaser. They talk about it all the time. Everything's a demon.

You overeat, it's a demon. Women say, I got delivered of a demon, overeating. And then you see them next year, they still haven't lost weight.

Everything's a demon. Nothing's soul life. Nothing's something that needs to be crucified, needs to be mortified.

It's all demons. But that's not right. But you know, when you preach the gospel, the enemy often throws up some spiritual opposition.

And you've got to know how to bind. Bind situations so the gospel can be free. And when you're preaching the gospel, there's often times where God just gives you a straight-out clue and says, pray for that person's human.

Now, you need the gifts of the Spirit to operate at times like that. You just can't get around it. As I said last night, I have a small history of miracles that I've seen in my life and have been performed during my Christian life.

And most of it has to do with times where we were reaching out with the gospel and God wanted to testify that Jesus is real and alive. So He moved in some spectacular way. Word of knowledge and word of wisdom sometimes come into a situation, especially in one of these kinds of contexts.

And God wants to move. So we need the Holy Spirit and an anointing of the Holy Spirit. Our brothers and sisters, we are all witnesses.

And God will use every one of us, sometimes even in spite of ourselves. But we could be effective witnesses. You know, we could bring people next Sunday morning to this gospel meeting who are ready to receive the Lord.

And it's been because we've been effective just to share with them the things that we've seen and heard. It involves us really being willing to the point we say, Lord, you know, I don't like to lay down my life more than anybody else, but I'm willing to lay it down for You. I think You're that kind of quality and I'm willing to do it.

And Lord, I don't want to presuppose and presume that I have the Holy Spirit all that I need. Oh Lord, grant us the boldness and the power to witness in the Holy Spirit. And then our house will get shaken.

Isn't that a wonderful story in Acts 4? How when John and Peter had been persecuted for sharing the gospel, they came back after their release from prison and they shared with the disciples in Acts chapter 4 the story of their persecution. And the disciples responded by praying to God who owns the heavens and the earth to take note of the threats of the leaders. And then grant that they get our boldness to proclaim Jesus while signs and wonders are done.

And it says the house was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And they spoke the Word of God with boldness and more people believed and more people believed. And we need our house shaken.

We can't presume that we have all the Holy Spirit we need. I know in one sense, you know, in every one of these areas we're on a tension. We're on a continual walk with the Lord.

We know the Spirit's leading and the Spirit's speaking to us within. But we always need a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit. It's presumptuous to believe you automatically walk under the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

At least for me. I know I'm enough of a sinner where I often miss it and quench it and grieve it and need to be renewed in my anointing. And in this matter of evaluating our lives.

Brothers and sisters, that's what I'd really like for us to do right now. There's one sense in which our lives are a continual pilgrimage. A continual walking with the Lord and the Spirit deals with us about areas of our lives and we yield them up and we go on.

There's a sense of continuity in our life. But brothers and sisters, just as true as that, there is a tension and a continuity of the fact that there are also special times of commitment in our life. There are times for us to evaluate where we're at.

There are times for us to renew our openness to the Lord's working in our lives. It isn't all just a daily routine. You know, many of us come from a context where the church was always trying to drum us up and revive us.

Every six months there's a revival. People just live like the world for five and a half months. And they come to the revival and they preach, you know, and warn everybody and tell you if you smoke, they don't think you're a Christian and get everybody all worked up.

And everybody rededicates. Then the revival's over and they start to slip by the following week. Six months later, they're all lost again and need to be saved.

And it's true that actually people get saved every six months. They get baptized again. They get saved again.

They stop wearing lipstick. Then the world hits them. They get lost.

Six months later, they come through a revival to get revived. We Baptists didn't believe once you get saved you get lost again, but we had a rededicator machine. We stuck it up in the front of the church every six months.

We ground people through the rededicator. So we just wore out the rededicator. I mean, by the time a kid was 18 years old and been to camp six times, he'd rededicated his life six times.

And how many times can you rededicate your life than just go downhill the minute you leave camp? Well, when you see something like that, you realize, look, our lives, the only way we're going to succeed is for us, personally, individually, to walk before the Lord and be personally responsible to Him. It isn't a carnal life with a few rededications. It's a life we live in the Spirit and mortifying the deeds of the flesh.

That's the only way we're going to make it through. We can't be revived and revived and revived. We can't pump air back into the system.

But there is a sense in which sometimes the saints, and corporately speaking, in order to enter into a season of harvesting like this, very frankly, have got to repent. It isn't always just repenting in the sense of sinfulness. It's just sometimes neglect.

It's just sometimes attitudinal. We got smug. You know, I think I'm ashamed of the fact that where I live, with our little group and assembly where I am, everybody who gets saved gets saved down in an evangelical church.

Then when folks want to go on with the Lord, they come to us. But we have no door for people to get saved. We're just not open to it.

We don't have any gospel meetings, you know, this kind of thing. I don't think that fully represents the Lord. Doesn't the Lord want a full testimony here? Or just a partial? We depend on others to get people saved and then we'll try to lead them on deeper.

That's not right, is it? You see, I see a vision of the tabernacle and praise God, by the grace of God, He's led us in sometimes by mistake, or it's not by mistake, but we think. He leads us into the holy place. Oh man, you go into the tent of the holy place, you see gold and embroidery and smell the incense.

Oh man, the bread. It's so nice in the holy place. And we find our ministry often we run outside the tent and we wave people in and say, come on into the holy place.

Now this is a needed ministry. But when you're waving people into the holy place from where you're standing, just outside the holy place, you're waving to Christians. Now who's going to go outside the outer tent and wave people into the brazen altar where they can get saved? It's dusty out there.

The sun is hot sometimes. Sometimes it's raining out there. It's that old sacrifice of Calvary's the brazen altar.

It's the labor that washes people. You know, even people who are saved, they've got to be washed in the bowl and the labor before they go into the holy place. I was chicken to enter into the thousand watts holy place.

And where folks are praying and raising their hands and where there's a meeting that's unstructured, I mean, that can only happen in the holy place and be pulled off. And I was used to structure. And folks said, come on into the holy place.

See revelation of Jesus. And I said, I don't know about this revelation stuff. I don't know about the sweet altar of incense and worship.

It sounds sort of syrupy to me. But once you go inside and see the Lord Jesus in the holy place, oh, it's beautiful, isn't it? Now, who wants to go back outside? Okay, who wants to volunteer to go back outside now? Out where it's dusty and dirty and out there where lost people are who are afraid to come to the brazen altar? Now, you've gotten past that. Who's going to go out there? You see, that's not so much fun.

How do they dance around in the midst of the incense? And yet, to be of full testimony of Jesus, there's a brazen altar and a labor as well as the stuff inside the holy place. That's the full testimony. And I think all the Lord wants to do is add the outer court to our life.

People come to the Lord. People get washed in basic discipling. People come into the holy place and see the beauty of the Lord and they're caught and captured.

That's real salvation. That's bringing somebody all the way in. I mean, some churches just have an outer court.

Isn't that a shame? And folks get saved and they just mill around the brazen altar. Well, praise God for the salvation of Jesus, but nobody tells them to go inside. Well, thank God that seems to be the burden of our hearts and I might add, the burden of the Spirit in this day.

He's trying to recover the saints to the inside. But still, that doesn't mean He's avoiding everybody outside. Jesus came down from heaven as a testimony that God loves the world.

He still does. And it takes a brokenness in our lives and a repentance to have the outer court restored in the fullness of testimony of what Jesus wants to be in our midst. I'd like first just to bow our heads.

We're just going to have a few moments of prayer. of evaluation. We don't want to take man's exhortation, but ask your Spirit to speak to us about our own willingness to be available, to share with people, to have our antennae up, to be willing to speak to things we've seen and heard and touched about Jesus.

We think that you're the door and you can open that door if there are just willing people. Lord, would you send us? And oh Lord, I would pray that perhaps we could receive a new and deeper anointing of the Holy Spirit for this season. More than we've known before.

With a greater moving of your Spirit and attestation to the reality of Jesus' resurrection and Lordship. Oh truly, as a result of His being enthroned in heaven, you've poured out the Holy Spirit. May we see that in these days.

As people open up their hearts and willingness to be a witness for you, open up doors of opportunity. Bring people to their mind. Enable them to make contact that's real.

Help them to pick up and bring people to this meeting and Lord, let there be heart. It's your Spirit that we ask that would do the work. But we know you want willing vessels on our part.

I pray that you would examine us in these days. Brothers and sisters, allow the Spirit to examine your heart. Is your heart clean? To pray that prayer of willingness.

Do you need restored? Do you again the joy of thy salvation? Is the Holy Spirit as it were, taken from you? And you need a fresh portion and filling of the Holy Spirit? Then, in Jesus' name, let's be honest before our God and be ready and willing to for the in-gathering in accordance with His will. Now let's just have a few moments if anybody wants to respond or pray.

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