

Evangelism Conference - Part 1

by Henry Blackaby

The foundation for evangelism is an intimate, personal, real, life-transforming encounter with the Father and the Son, and God's people must respond personally and corporately to change the nation.

Duration: 50:11

Scripture: Matthew 28:18, John 17:2-3, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:25, Colossians 3:23, James 1:22, 1 John 1:1-4

Topics: "Personal Evangelism", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a personal relationship with God. He states that knowing the stories of the Bible is not enough to transform one's life; it is the relationship with God that brings about transformation. The speaker also discusses the current state of the nation and believes that the future of America depends on the response of God's people. He encourages the audience to focus on their relationship with God rather than relying on political elections. The sermon is based on 1 John 1 and the speaker emphasizes the need for experiential and personal encounters with God.

Transcript

Our brother Boggs gave an impassioned plea about the condition of our nation and the need for God's people to become involved. He could have spoken for an hour and it still would have been an understatement. I believe we're in a cultural war that will determine the future of America, not just from the way in which we govern ourselves, but the way in which God may respond to the nation.

I do not feel we're immune from the judgment of God. And I'm one that believes this year may well determine whether we will experience revival or judgment. And that lies squarely in the life of God's people.

Don't look to the presidential election. That will not solve the problems of America. God has assigned that a covenant people who belong to him are the only instrument he uses to change a nation.

If we will not respond personally and corporately, then God may well bring judgment. I'm one that believes that 9-11 was God's announcement to his people that he was beginning to remove the hedge of protection from America because of the sin of God's people, not the nation. As goes God's people, so goes the nation.

And right now the condition of a nation is a reflection of the condition of God's people. But we will not accept that, and the leaders will not accept it. And you remember when God came to Israel, he gave them an option of revival or judgment.

And it was the spiritual leaders who never got the message. And he destroyed Israel utterly. So later he came to Jerusalem and Judah and he uttered the same heart cry.

And once again it was the religious leaders of the people of God who never got the message from God. And God destroyed Jerusalem and Judah, put them into 70 years of bondage. And then God said, I'll send my son, surely they will hear him.

But it was the religious leaders of God's people who never got the message. And not only did they reject the message of God, but they crucified the Son of God. And in 70 to 72 AD, Jerusalem was utterly and totally destroyed.

And there is a moment in the life of Jesus in Luke 19.41 where it says, when Jesus saw the city, he wept over it. Do you know why he wept? He had just come from the Father. And the Father had announced to his son, it's now too late for Jerusalem.

It's too late. Jerusalem will be destroyed. Because they never recognized the time of God's coming to them.

And I believe that Jesus knew what eternity was like. And he wept with incredible pain that many that he saw would enter into an eternity without God and without hope. And now it's our turn.

And as I go across the nation, across denominations and across every level of spiritual leadership, we are no different than they were. It's the spiritual, religious leaders of America who do not get the message. And so when 9-11 happened, every part of America changed except the churches.

And Bill Bright and I sat together before his death and we made a video one year later from 9-11. We saw absolutely eye to eye. The only part of America that never got the message were the churches.

There's not any more prayer than there used to be. And if you listened to the sermons and watched the building programs and the activities of the churches, you'd never know that 9-11 ever happened. And we certainly would never have known, if they listened to us, that we believed God was trying to give a warning to God's people.

And so this evangelism conference, in the heart of a very, very crucial time in our history, is exceedingly important. And I believe that the Holy Spirit will be doing his work in your heart and mine. He'll be taking from the heart of God and making you exceedingly alert to the heart of God.

In John 16, you remember, Jesus said, when he, the Spirit of Truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth. But he will not speak on his own initiative. But whatever he hears, that's what he'll speak.

Who's the Holy Spirit listening to? The Father. Do you know the Holy Spirit never speaks to you except what he hears from the Father? And what the Father has to say to you and me is life and death. So during this conference, you can never guess at the mind and heart of God.

It has to be revealed to you by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to do that. So, as the messages are brought, as the breakout times are given, you're going to be face-to-face with the urgent

So, throughout the time that I share with you, not only will we try to open the scriptures, but I'll be pressing you up against the application. In other words, when we come to a point I'll say, and what difference clearly has this truth brought about in your life? What now is different in the way you live, the way you treat your marriage or your family, the way you relate to your church or your workplace. What radical differences is God making in your life and how can you identify with what God is saying here? Now, John, and he is speaking for several others of the apostles, is going to give you a witness to how real and personal the living God became to him.

And then he is going to say, I am sharing this with you so that you can have the same encounter with him. So let's have before us this amazing passage of scripture. That which was from the beginning.

Where does you think he is talking about the beginning? What beginning? Right from the very beginning. And he is going to say, that eternal life that was with the Father. In other words, from eternity to eternity.

So he is going to say, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the word of life. That's a person. The life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

That which we have seen and heard, we declare to you. That you also may have fellowship with us. And truly, our fellowship, our koinonia, is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And these things we write to you, that your joy may be full. If you read that carefully, you'll suddenly sense that we have become immersed in an evangelical culture that does not acknowledge this. In other words, our definition of eternal life doesn't even come close to this.

We talk to people about eternal life as being going to heaven when you die. That's not what eternal life is. We're going to see that a little more deeply in a moment.

Eternal life is a person. He said, that eternal life that was with the Father and has come into our awareness and our experience, we're declaring to you. Now, when we read this and read it rather carefully, did you begin to say, do I have that kind of a witness out of my encounter with the word of life? Was I given a concept or did I meet a person? Was I given a series of scriptures to believe with my head or did I encounter that word of life which was with the Father? Can I say that I have heard and touched and felt and experienced and known a life-transforming encounter with God? Do you know why we have difficulty giving witness? We have nothing to give witness to.

You cannot witness to what you have not experienced. And you don't experience a feeling, you experience a person. Now, this scripture says, our koinonia, our fellowship, is with the Father and the Son.

Now, let me open that just briefly. The word fellowship is the most intimate, personal, practical, experiential relationship of the love of God. It is bringing your life into a relationship with God, where He is your life.

Not a concept, not a set of truths, not a set of doctrines, but a person. Let me ask you about the witness you give. Do you give a witness that looks like this? Do you know why that early church saw the whole Roman Empire turned upside down? They had something to bear witness to.

Do you know why America does not meet God? They don't meet Him in us. They meet religion. And I believe that the Christian community has shifted from a relationship to religion.

So, we practice religious activity. But all the people see are good people practicing religious activity. But when did someone last come to you and say, I came face to face with God when I met you? I somehow was in the presence of God.

I remember, as a pastor for more than 30 years, I remember going to a home of an unsaved man, whose wife was a member of our church and she had cancer, and things were pretty tough. So, I went to the home, and this little modest home, and I spoke with him for some time. And then I said, I want to pray with you.

Well, I don't think he even hardly knew that he was supposed to bow his head. He had very little orientation to religion at all. So, I prayed, as I always do, very earnestly, and I talked to God.

I wasn't saying a prayer. I was talking to God. And when I finished, this guy looked up and he was looking all over and he said, who are you talking to? He said, you were talking to someone who was right here.

I said, yes, my brother. It was exactly what I was doing. When was the last time someone heard you pray? And out of that prayer began to tremble, because they knew they were face to face with God.

The foundation for evangelism is an intimate, personal, real, life-transforming encounter 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with the Father and with the Son. Now, I want you to pick up a parallel passage from the same author, but this time from John 17, verses 2 and 3. Because I want you to catch in these few moments the reality of our fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and we'll open that up a moment. You recognize this is probably the most significant prayer in the entire Bible.

It is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, talking to the Father. And this is surrounding Gethsemane and the cross. But listen to what he says.

Verse 2, well, let's start from verse 1. Jesus spoke these words, lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you, as you have given him authority over all flesh. Let me stop.

Does that include you? Has the Father given Jesus Christ absolute, total authority over your life? What's it looking like? Would your children know by watching you that Jesus Christ has the exclusive, total authority over your life? Would they know that by watching you? Would the people in your workplace know that? Does your wife or husband know that? Jesus said, Father, you have given me authority over all flesh. Now, to do what? Well, let him tell you. That he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him.

Then comes this awesome verse, and this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. So what is eternal life? Going to heaven when you die? Absolutely not. That's a byproduct of eternal life.

What did Jesus say eternal life was? To know the Father, and to know his Son, whom he has sent. Now, the key to that is the word to know, and that's why I enjoy the Amplified Bible, because the Amplified Bible is not a translation. It is an Amplified Bible.

That's the way my wife talks. She says, Henry, the Amplified Bible is an Amplified Bible. Now, what it is, is that when it comes to a work in the original language, that is very crucial, that we do not have an English word to translate it.

It is of such a nature, you cannot translate it with one word. So the Amplified Bible takes that word and amplifies, expands it with as many words as necessary, until you understand what that verse is saying. Now, here's how the Amplified goes, and you'll catch an understanding of two things, what it means to know the Father, and what it means to have eternal life.

It goes like this, Father, this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God. That is, that they may progressively become more intimately and personally acquainted with you, perceiving, understanding, and experiencing the wonders of your person more clearly and more strongly. And that they may come to know your Son in exactly the same way.

That they would progressively become more intimately and personally acquainted with you, not with the doctrine of God, not with the doctrine of Christ, but with the person of God and the person of Christ. Eternal life is the most intimate, personal, interrelationship between you and the Father, where he progressively, more intimately and personally, makes himself known to you, so that you come to know more and more and more of him practically living out his life in you. And that's what Paul said about Christ.

He said, I, Paul, and I can understand it. I, Paul, have been crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live.

Then what does he say? But it's not me who is living. It's Christ living out his life in me. And the life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Could you say that's how you are experiencing eternal life in your life? Now, remember, Jesus is the one who's defining it. Don't let religion define eternal life. I've talked with many people who have no excitement about a relationship of intimacy with the God of the universe, and they say, well, I was saved when I was 12.

And I'd say, well, tell me about it. Well, I asked Jesus into my heart, and I was baptized. I'd say, my brother, you haven't even begun to experience eternal life.

Eternal life is an intimate, progressive, personal relationship, life transforming with God himself. So the first thing you look for is, what does the Bible say about God? Let me give you a very clear illustration. God's goal in Romans 8.28 is to conform you to the image of his Son.

Is that not true? Northwesterners say, amen, every once in a while. Do you want to know what God's up to in your life? He's not trying to make you successful. He's not trying to make you a soul winner.

He's trying to conform you to the image of his Son, and the byproduct of that will be to attract people by the multitudes to the person of Jesus Christ who is living out his life in you, and God, like a potter shaping the clay, is shaping you. Now let me ask you, when was the last time you can give testimony to a moment last week when you knew beyond a question of a doubt that the God of the universe was shaping some aspect of your life to be more like Christ than you've ever been? Do you want to know what God's up to? Don't tell him what to do. He knows what he's doing, and he's told you what he's up to, and he's trying to conform you to the image of his Son.

Now the application. I'm glad John's here, John Franklin. He's related to prayer in some way, and he'll be talking to you about that.

But there's nothing that seems to stand out more significantly in the life of Jesus than his prayer life. Do you suppose that God is going to conform you to the image of his Son in every area of your life except your prayer life? Folks, the first order of business when God goes to conform you to the image of his Son is to affect your desire to meet with God. I think I could almost say a prayerless Christian is a total contradiction.

I absolutely do not believe that a person can be a Christian and not be a prayer. Because of the nature of what eternal life is. And he has in Hebrews 10, he has made a way into the holiest.

A new and living way prepared for us by the blood of Christ and his broken body. Therefore we're to come boldly into the holiest. Let me ask you, when was the last time you did that? Do you know that nobody can walk into that new and living way prepared for us at the cost of the life of the Son of God into the holiest place of the universe and come out the same? Do you know why the world does not believe our testimony? They don't see a life that matches what we're saying.

You see, truly, our koinonia, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son. Now, the testimony of John is that which we have seen, that which we have heard, that which our hands have handled of the Word of Life. That eternal life that was with the Father was manifest to us.

Take a long, hard observation of your relationship to God. Do you love him more today than you ever have in your life? Have you come to know the incredible love of God that passes all understanding? Take the third chapter of Ephesians. Has the Spirit of God done a work in your heart to bring you to an understanding experientially of the length of Christ's love, the depth of Christ's love, the height of his love, the width of his love? And that love passes all understanding.

And do you know how he concludes that section? He says, when the Spirit of God strengthens you on the inside and brings you to that kind of relationship with Jesus Christ, you will be filled with all the fullness of God. And do you know the verse that follows it? Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all you can even ask or think, and do it according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church to the end of the age. Could you describe your church that way? That your church right now is filled with all the fullness of God.

And the release of the power of God is so evident that the people in your community and the towns down the road are saying, those folk who are turning the world upside down are about to knock on our door. Wouldn't it be wonderful if eternal life, fellowship with the Father and with the Son, the intimacy of an ongoing manifestation of the presence and power of God was real in each of our lives? I've made a commitment to God that I will not preach a message that I do not incarnate the message. Do you know why? What would you call a person who spoke one thing and lived another? A hypocrite.

Then we ought never to preach a message that we are not the living incarnation of the message we preach. That's the most powerful tool in the hand of God in evangelism, is a living witness unto him, not for him, but unto him. And when they start to see, let me give you an illustration.

Several weeks ago, I was asked if I'd meet with a Vietnamese pastor. He had asked to see me. He couldn't speak English.

He had an interpreter. This was his first visit outside Vietnam. Now, folks, I learned a long while, if you want the right answer, ask the right question.

So I said, Lord, what should I ask this dear brother? He looked like he was in his fifties. Very quiet, demure pastor. Now, when I tell you this story, I want you then to apply it into your life and your church.

One of the most unreached places and parts of America is the Northwest. I'm aware of that. So I asked the question of this Vietnamese pastor.

I said, tell me of the goodness of God in Vietnam. Now, folks, it is absolutely accurate to be able to say if you're ever talking to a Christian, they ought to have a testimony of the goodness of God. I said, my brother, tell me of the goodness of God.

He just faced it up. I didn't say, how can we help you? What are your problems? What's the persecution? Those are the wrong questions. I want to know what God's doing.

My life is God-centered, not man-centered, problem-centered, or circumstance-centered. So I said, tell me the goodness of God. Here's what he said.

He said in 1975, when the North overran the South, he was pastoring 40 people. And he said, when they overran the South, he said, I literally prepared to die. But he said, to my utter amazement, God began and was already working in the hearts of many people.

And it was not too long before he was pastoring 5,000 members. And he said, the government got wind of it. And the government put him in prison for 29 months.

And he shared just briefly the awful time. But he said, while he was there, God announced what God was about to do. And said two things.

When you get out, I want you to preach the gospel to the children and the youth. That's up to 30. And he said, I want you to become involved with the house churches.

I want you to establish some. I said, well, what's happened? He said, I have experienced 147,000 professions of faith. And he said, I now guide and train and equip the leaders of 1,260 house churches.

Folks, you're looking at one man, wholly yielded to Almighty God. Could that happen here? Now, folks, the difference has never been the culture. It has been the nature of the God we serve.

And how we relate. Do you know what eternal life is? It is experientially, progressively coming to know personally, intimately, the God of the universe expressing himself in your life and through your life. I had a very small touch of this not long ago.

And it scared me half to death. I still am trembling. I spoke at the cove, Billy Graham's training center.

And I spoke with all my heart to that group. And afterwards, a man came up to me and he said, I listened to your message. He said, there are people all over the world who are leaders who need to hear that.

Would you be willing to speak at the United Nations? Or what would you say? Well, I'll go aside and pray about it. And the father said, what have you just been praying? So I went to the United Nations. I got to speak initially to 14 of the top ambassadors from the countries in Africa.

Now, I don't know how you relate to God. But I assume that God orders my steps. And I assume that what happens next is God announcing what he's doing.

Not what he wants me to do. What he's doing. And as these dear people began to talk to me, I discovered nearly every one of them were Christians.

And most of the presidents of their countries were Christians. And they're crying out to their fellow believers, won't somebody come over and help us? Later I'll tell you part of that. Then they said, would you meet with about a hundred in Washington, D.C., because most countries have different diplomats.

One for U.N. and one for Washington. And I did. And one of the countries, the ambassador, took the message that I gave, God's love to us, so God's love can go through us, and called the president of this country.

And said, you've got to have this guy come. And when you make your trip preaching all over Benin, he needs to go with you. So he wrote me and asked me if I would do that.

But then there's three major organizations who relate to the U.N. Christian. The three leaders came to me and made a statement. They said, Henry, we've been listening to what you're saying.

And we've been watching your life. If at any time, under any condition, that God instructs you to talk with and meet with any head of government in any country of the world, we can arrange it for you. And I thought, my Lord.

And then God says, that's right. I am your Lord. I have access to every country in the world.

And I can put anybody in front of anybody that I choose. If I can take Joseph out of the prison and put him next to Pharaoh, what do you suppose I can do with you? Our problem is, we don't know him that well. We know about him.

We know the stories. The stories don't transform a life. The relationship does.

Do you know what the basic foundation for the entire Christian life is? An intimate, personal, progressive, extensive, growing, personal relationship with the Father and with his Son. And that will bring into your life who he is and what he's doing and where he's going. How would you describe your relationship to God? It's not a matter of learning how to figure out what to say to a lost person.

Folks, your witness ought to be an absolute, spontaneous witness to a living relationship to God. If you have to figure out what to say, you're a long ways from the relationship. We're not to be witnesses for him.

We'll be witnesses unto him. That means when he is actively involved in your life, you bear witness unto him. The world doesn't understand, but you can say, let me bear witness unto him.

What you're experiencing is what God is like. And witnessing ought to be a spontaneous, revealing, manifesting of the living Father and the Son in your life and in mine. That makes the testimony believable.

When your life has met God and you have been transformed, you could no more keep that quiet. As I was pastoring, I found I didn't have to do much teaching them what to say. My assignment was to bring God's people into such an intimate, personal, real, dynamic relationship to the Father and the Son that you couldn't keep them quiet any more than you can stop Niagara with a paper bag.

The more they experienced the living Christ, you couldn't keep them quiet. I remember the first few college students we led to Christ. It was so dramatic in their life.

They went all over the campus, and it wasn't long in my time there, I baptized 180 university students. I didn't have to give a soul-winning study course to one of them. You know why? The relationship was so real and so dynamic, they bore witness to him who had just transformed their life.

And that was so compelling to others. They said, I want what you have. There's a whole dynamic in that.

Now, I'm not saying we shouldn't teach people, but if you have to get to the level where you try to motivate someone, you know where the problem is? They're out of fellowship with the living Lord. They just come back into that relationship, and you couldn't keep them quiet. There's something happening.

So, our time together is going to walk through this first chapter, which talks about fundamental, basic foundations for all evangelism. It begins with a koinonia, a fellowship, an intimate love relationship that is progressive and intimate and personal and very powerful with the Father and with the Son. Now, did he not say, all authority? Now, how much is included in all authority? All authority in heaven and on earth.

Do you mean all authority on earth has been given to Jesus? Do the people around you recognize him exercising that authority through your church? He said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Now go, and I'll go with you. What more do you need? He got it all.

But is the world encountering the difference that relationship makes with all the authority of the universe and the one who dwells within you now expressing himself through you? Should that make a difference in your marriage, your children? Should it make a difference in your church, your workplace? I'm going to talk about the workplace later, because one of the greatest moves of God right now is what God's doing with Christian CEOs in America in the Fortune 100 and 500 companies. I've never seen a move that equals it. And I believe he's going to transform corporate America by what I see.

Let's take a moment to pray together. Would you bow your head with me? Did you find your heart strangely warmed by the Scripture, by the nearness of your Lord? Did you find the Holy Spirit convicting you? We just have not been measuring up. That's what sin is, coming short of what God has required.

And have you heard God himself pleading with you? Be reconciled to me. Come home. Come back.

Return to me. And what is he hearing? Oh Lord, forgive me. Oh Lord, what shame is over my life.

For the world is not seeing you in all your fullness in me. But Lord, I want that. So if you'll show me what to do, you show me what to be, I will never again be satisfied to live without your manifest presence in me and through me.

Father, you have a great salvation. And Father, words fail when we go to describe it. What you have provided, even the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, you said has been given to every solitary believer.

You said the proclamation of the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Oh Father, a thousand promises that simply describe our koinonia with you and with your Son. Keep us from living religion only.

And bring us into the deepest relationship with you, so that what Jesus said to the disciples will be true of us. How people receive us, they are receiving him. And how they receive him, they are receiving the one

who sent him.

Oh Father, may the Northwest explode with a living witness to everybody of your presence and the presence of your Son living out in your people. For your namesake, we pray. Amen.

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