

Leading People to Christ (Pt 1)

by Nigel Lee

Effective evangelism requires understanding the person's perspective and presenting the gospel in a way that is relevant and relatable to their life and experiences.

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Scripture: Mark 10:17

Topics: "Evangelism", "Sharing the Gospel", "Personal Evangelism"

Description

Nigel Lee emphasizes the importance of personal evangelism by examining biblical examples, particularly the rich young ruler and the Samaritan woman. He highlights how Jesus engaged with individuals by addressing their understanding of God, their own sinfulness, and the necessity of repentance and faith. Lee encourages believers to be sensitive and patient in their approach to sharing the gospel, recognizing the barriers people face and the need for a loving relationship with God. He stresses that evangelism is not just about reaping but also about sowing seeds of faith and understanding in people's lives.

Transcript

May we enjoy being here in fellowship with one another because we sense that we're learning. Your spirit is causing us to hunger to serve you sensitively and lovingly, fruitfully in a way that pleases you. Help us all now Lord we pray for your namesake.

Amen. Well this is a very refreshing experience for us. We've just been enduring or enjoying three or four days of field leaders meetings talking about finance and policies and all that and to talk about leading people to Christ is a very refreshing change I can assure you.

The material we're going to try and cover in this morning's session and we're not going to bind ourselves to this if discussion goes on we can try and catch up this afternoon, but the material we're going to try and cover is we're going to begin by looking at two biblical examples of personal evangelism. I'll give one and then Nigel will give one. Then we're going to just try and get a grasp of what the gospel actually is and what actually happens when people are led to Christ, when people are converted, what actually happens.

And then if we have time we'll look at some of the obstacles which people commonly face or commonly share they face when they are considering that great step of coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. So a biblical example to begin with and I want you to turn to Mark's gospel chapter 10 and we'll have a look at this story of the rich young ruler. Mark chapter 10 and we read from verse 17 to verse 22.

Mark 10 17. As Jesus started on his way a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher he asked what must I do to inherit eternal life? Why do you call me good? Jesus answered.

No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother. Teacher he declared all these I've kept since I was a boy.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack he said. Go sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come follow me. At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.

Just try and imagine the scene for a moment. The Lord Jesus has probably just passed through a town and he's heading on maybe over a road to the next place of ministry and suddenly he hears the clinking of a chain behind him because the rich young ruler of the city possibly the mayor of that city is running after Jesus and his mayoral chain is clinking as he runs and all of a sudden Jesus looks around and here is the mayor of the town he's passed through on his knees in the dusty road. What must I do to inherit eternal life? It's an interesting personal witnessing situation isn't it? Hasn't happened to me this year not the mayor of a town on his knees on a dusty road but let's see how Jesus dealt with this particular situation and I want this to bring five principles out of the story.

First interesting thing not one of the principles I want to share with you is that Jesus answered this man's question with a question. The man asked Jesus what must I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus didn't say very much about eternal life in answer to that question did he? He said why do you call me good? There's only one who is good and that's God alone. He got this man thinking.

He got this man asking the right questions and where did Jesus want this man to start thinking? What kind of questions did he want this man to face? Well he wanted this young fellow to start thinking about God. He wanted to turn his eyes towards God and in particular he wanted to stress the holiness of God and an essential part of our gospel and if we're going to truly present our gospel an essential part of that presentation is of the character of God and his holiness is of course of great importance. The question is how can we repent to a God that we don't understand? If you're truly going to repent towards God then you've got to have some concept some understanding of the God to whom you are repenting.

That's the first principle. He turned this young inquirer's eyes towards the character of the God he was about to do dealings with. The second thing which Jesus did was to remind the rich young ruler of the law of God.

You know the commandments he says in verse 19 don't murder, don't commit adultery and so on. I think it's very important today in our presentation of the gospel especially in the western world where most of my experience is to preach or to speak the law in our gospel presentation and maybe we can have a lively discussion about this in a few moments but I don't think the majority of people in my country certainly understand what sin is and to say to people today you are a sinner well that's going to give certain thoughts to that person. He will probably immediately think of adultery if you use the word sin today in my part of the world anyway.

He may well think of murder he's not I would imagine going to think of hypocrisy he's not going to think of pride he's not going to think of rebellion against God and so on. So I would suggest to you that if people

are to understand sin they're going to need to have that sin explained to them. This is what Jesus is doing I suggest by presenting the law of God to the rich young ruler.

Now what is the purpose of the law today? Well one of the purposes is revealed in Galatians chapter 3. You might like just to turn to that verse Galatians 3 and verse 24 Galatians 3 verse 24 Paul says the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. So there is a way in which the law can lead men and women to Christ. There is a way in which the law can lead men and women to justification by faith.

You might like to turn back to Romans chapter 7 just for this second verse on the same subject. Romans 7 and verse 7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not. Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law.

For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had said do not covet. This is what the Lord Jesus I suggest to you is doing here. He is using the law of God to reveal sin to this young man.

That is the second principle. Number one he turned his eyes towards God and towards God's holiness. Number two he turned his eyes towards himself and helped him to experience and realise his own sinfulness.

And then the third great principle if you turn back to Mark chapter 10. The third great principle is there in verse 21. Jesus looked at this young man and loved him.

So Jesus isn't only giving this man truth. He is not just giving this man facts about God and facts about himself. He is loving this young man into the kingdom of God or seeking to do so.

David Watson just a year or so before he died received a letter and in one of his tracts I think I read the correspondence from a young student we had met at university. And this student had come to Christ just before one of David Watson's meetings in a university. And this is what she wrote to him.

For many years I've wanted to be wanted. I've been unimpressed by sermons, religious books or tracts. Some months ago I came into contact with a group of Christians who loved God.

And in their love for him they loved one another. And I knew that I had come home. Maybe that person when she came to Christ didn't know very much about the facts of God.

Even the facts of her own sinfulness. That she was faced by love. A love she couldn't express in human terms.

And the love of a group of Christians brought that young lady to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. So that's the third great principle. Number one he taught him about God.

Number two he taught him about himself. Number three he had great love in his heart for this young man. Number four the necessity of repentance.

He says to the rich young ruler go, verse 21, sell everything you have and give to the poor. The tendency of some people if they'd been dealing with this young man, I suppose I'd have to include myself probably, would have been something like this. Let's not touch the money issue yet.

Okay? Let's get this guy into the kingdom and then we'll start talking about money. I mean money is going to be the big problem with this fellow isn't it? So let's do a lot of pre-evangelism and so on. Let's get him really interested and maybe into the kingdom or at least halfway into the kingdom if there's such a position.

I'm sure there isn't. But then let's start dealing with the money issue. But Jesus is absolutely straightforward with this young man.

He knows there's no real coming to God before he has left this other God in his life far behind. So long before the call of faith the Lord Jesus says to this young fellow go and sell what you have and give to the poor. And then finally the fifth principle you have the call to faith.

Jesus says to him come and follow me. After understanding something of God and something of yourself and the necessity of repentance if you're willing to turn from these things which rule your life then come and follow me. That's how Jesus dealt with one individual.

Nigel. I think we're going to see, I hope we're going to see during this seminar that a great principle of consider how you're going to present. Jesus obviously on this occasion is presenting the gospel.

And there are going to be other ways of today of course in Britain. The view which people have of God is a very very mixed up view indeed. And very often I find in witnessing today you have to start with explaining the God that you're talking about.

Because people have so many varied and crazy ideas of God. A few years ago in the Sunday Mirror there was the serialization of some book about God being someone who visited the planets. It wasn't the Von Daniken books but two thousand years ago he visited planet Earth and he's been visiting all the other planets as well.

It was a crazy crazy presentation of God. And thousands if not millions of people read that presentation and I'm sure a great number believed it or accepted at least part of it. So very often in Britain today and I'm sure in many other countries even more than Britain as Nigel says you've got to start to know where a person's at in order to know where to begin.

You may have to start with an explanation of the God where you might be beginning with people who have far less than this orthodox Jew. An example of evangelism amongst those who are much much more ignorant. Cornelius was suggested a God-fearer but he didn't he wasn't certainly a Jew he didn't have the same Old Testament background quite.

The woman of Sumeria we'll come on to her in a moment. She seems to me to be a half and half case sorry. In Athens yes there's another very good example where he's speaking not to a Samaritan they were corrupted Jews originally they had a lot of Jewish ideas and teachings.

The people in the University of Athens the people who used to chat debate talk discuss the intellectuals he said I'll speak to you about the God you don't know at all. Yes yes Don. The Philippian jailer astonished by his prison falling down around him.

A sturdy middle-class Roman citizen probably an ex-soldier and would have been completely pagan he probably didn't even understand why he was required to keep Paul and Silas under lock and key. But he had questions that were produced by a catastrophic event his entire prison fell down around him and Paul was able there to share the gospel. Yes now you've got the idea that's an important thing.

Peter has started with a man who is religious with whom we have a lot of common ground. The Mark 10 situation. I want to move on to John chapter 4 the Samaritan woman.

But to leave that crucial idea in your mind that you must begin where people are at and if you're building bridges some of them may be they may need to be very very long. Both Peter and I have spent quite a lot of time over the years in evangelism I think he was an evangelist before he came into O.M. I became more of an evangelist after coming into O.M. and I work a lot with students and I will face roomfuls hundreds and hundreds of students most of whom will have the vaguest ideas of God in many cases quite a rooted opposition to the very idea of God and you're beginning an awful lot further away. Spending days just teaching them truth laying a foundation before you can ever begin to ask for faith.

Faith comes by hearing the word of God. They've got to first believe that there is a God who speaks through his word so you know it takes takes a long time a lot of patience involved in fishing. John 4 John chapter 4 now you know the story well we'll begin with verse 4. Now he had to go through Samaria.

Oh yeah? Why? Most Jews walked round it. Wouldn't set foot in it. Place was was a shame on the nation.

It reflected badly on Israel's history. It was a defiled place and they would take the extra days walking all the way round. What does it mean when it says Jesus had to go through Samaria? There's no geographical have to.

It's a necessity born out of love. He had to go to meet a person. God begins to deal with families and villages by picking one person.

He starts with every family by picking one person somewhere in history. So he gets into the family he begins to work that way and he knows about this woman and she is going to be the key to the village. He loves her.

He's going to go looking for worshippers for the father. So he has to. Has to go into Samaria.

He came to the town in Samaria called Sychar near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus tired as he was from the journey sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour which with John's account of the measurement of the Jewish day means midday.

Exhausted. Burning sun. Flots down and we're going to see Christ as the evangelist crossing a number of barriers and the first one that we often face is the apathy barrier.

You know you don't feel like evangelism isn't that often true? You know you sit with people you meet them neighbours in the street and really it's actually much more easy if we don't have to get into an evangelistic kind of conversation with them. Isn't that true? I find it so. I heard about you.

And often we have to cross the first barrier. In this case the apathy barrier. Everything in him may have been saying oh I've been walking for miles let me let me just flop and rest or I'll get a drink off this woman.

Thank you very much. Oh I feel better. Bye bye.

Jesus first of all had to cross that barrier in himself caused by tiredness first that it was midday the inconvenience. Then the next one is the cultural barrier. She was not only a Samaritan and the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans as verse nine says but she was a woman.

Great tendency on the part of the Jew to say women. Women. You don't expect women to understand spiritual things.

Not the things of God. Not women. Poor ignorant creatures.

Orthodox rabbi wouldn't even greet his own wife in the street. She may be coming home from the supermarket loaded down with luggage and the chap will walk straight past her without even you know see you at home lunchtime dear. Jesus had to cross those kind of barriers and and there are all kinds of class barriers even within our own society aren't there.

I wonder how many people you meet whom you naturally think that person would not be interested in the gospel. I know it. I mean look at them.

A woman or a bus conductor or a garage attendant or a McDonald's slave you know. They wouldn't be interested in the gospel. Or a godless student sitting there in his arrogance with his arms folded and his feet up on the chair in front had been dragged along by a Christian to listen to the meeting.

They wouldn't really be interested. And Jesus begins to cross that barrier too. The cultural barrier.

And he begins to build bridges. First of all there in verse 7 he asks for a drink. A simple ordinary human contact.

Can you help me please? A shared human need is how you get on with your neighbours isn't it? The people you meet. Can you help me? Hold the door open for someone. You talk about something.

You share a common problem. You shelter under the same umbrella. You know.

Something that puts you into very ordinary human contact. And she's rather surprised because she hadn't expected a Jew to ask a drink because the water vessel would have been defiled by her touch. But he seems to be treating her from the very beginning with respect.

Down to her ordinary human respect. Build a bridge. The purpose of that human contact bridge is so that she might come across to start thinking in a new way.

Raising spiritual questions in her mind. Jesus immediately that they've got the drinking of the water and conversation about water. Then he starts to lead her across the bridge to think about another kind of water altogether.

Very gently. Had she ever thought about another kind of first apart from the first that this water out of the deep well is going to satisfy. A first in life itself.

Something deeper. Something more meaningful. And another kind of water that meets that sort of first.

See opening up her mind to crossing the bridge to think about something in a new way. Build a bridge and then gently begin to invite the person across it. Living water he says.

No more first. Something inside you like a spring. She's never heard talk like this before.

But as Jesus talks she begins to think well this is true. I do have a first. She doesn't at first understand very much.

She asks to be given this well so that she doesn't have to come out to this particular well. The dear lady is a bit muddled still. But let's be patient.

The apathy barrier. The cultural barrier. And then verses 16, 17, 18.

Once she started showing that she's a bit thirsty he said he told her go call your husband and come back. What was her reaction? Her eyes dropped. Her voice went a bit quiet.

She maybe went a bit white. I have no husband she replied. Jesus said to her you're right when you say you have no husband.

The fact is you've had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you've just said is quite true. The sin barrier.

The spiritual barrier. That will also have to be crossed. You can have conversation about normal human things.

You can begin to arouse spiritual thirst but there's going to have to be a facing up to that which does separate a human from God. But please notice that when Jesus just begins to put his finger on that barrier he does it gently and almost complimentarily. You're right.

That's true. What you just said is correct. He doesn't hammer her or sort of move away from her or have you know staring fanatic's eyes or start stabbing a finger at her and making her feel as if she is on the other side of a barrier from him.

He has actually come to sit beside her. Christ came to this earth to dwell among men and women in order to sit beside people at wells and talk person to person. So he talks gently but he does face her with the reality of not knowing God personally being separated from him by sin.

She's lived all her life as though what she did didn't really matter. Life was just an endless circle of physical relationships and well she'd married the previous five. We're not told why she'd moved from one to the other.

But anyway she stopped bothering getting married. Now it was becoming a bit of a chore. Marriage.

So she was just living with this fellow. Not satisfied. She's already said so.

That sense of thirst is arising in her. And now she's facing up to the fact that this is wrong. What then happens in the story? Interesting.

Very typical. Immediately questions of religious tradition arise. Tell me what church do you go to? What denomination do you belong to? Have you ever found this happen? What do you really believe about? And they've got a whole list of things.

Abortion, capital punishment, the government, what the Christians are doing in Beirut or Northern Ireland. Do you belong to this place or that place down the street? Suddenly it comes up. And Jesus doesn't really answer the question again.

But immediately he begins to lead her away from these questions of public religious behaviour, whether we're to worship on this mountain or that mountain, to the reality of a new relationship. Becoming a

Christian isn't a matter of new rules and changing labels but a new relationship. So at once in the story he starts to talk about father.

He's never mentioned father up to now. But in verse 21 we begin to hear of the father. And then again in 23.

The true worshippers will worship the father in spirit and truth. They are the kind of worshippers the father seeks. Now maybe this lady had never had a decent relationship with her own father.

Possibly this was why her relationship subsequently with men had gone so wrong and why she'd moved from one to the other. But he begins to offer her a new relationship with someone whom he calls to her father. And they begin to discuss how to worship father.

Jesus is so interesting. The previous chapter, John chapter 3, he's talking to Nicodemus, the great expert in Jewish worship, in religious ceremony. And then his next chapter with the poor sinful woman, well he tells one of them that they need to be born again and with the other he discusses the depths of how you worship God.

Now which way round would you have done it? You would probably have discussed the principles and the theology of worship with the theology professor. And told the poor dear benighted woman, the immoral one, dear you need to be born again don't you? Jesus does it the other way round. Very respectful.

Talks to this woman of a relationship that she can have with God who is a father. Who seeks for her to worship him. She is to become a new daughter.

A new father. That's Christ's goal. That's why he's come.

He says later to the disciples, I've come to do my father's will. My food, that which actually satisfies me in life, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. And if it was God's will that he go looking for worshippers, that's what will satisfy.

That's Christ's goal in this whole conversation. Build the bridges. Establish the human contact.

Lead her to ask questions that reflect her own need. Gently put aside the religious questions that come up and show the reality of a relationship with God so that she might worship. We want to leave behind us worshippers don't we? That was what satisfied Christ in life.

I mean he plopped down by the well in the early verses. His disciples went off to buy food. When they later came back from McDonald's or wherever they got the takeaway from the thing, he said no I don't want any food now.

I'm satisfied. I have fed well while you were gone. And they whisper, well has anybody brought him food? No my food, that which actually satisfies me, is to have found another worshipper for the father and brought her to understand that a relationship with the father will satisfy her too.

It's often true isn't it that the poor and the despised make the best worshippers. Jesus had come to look for folk like that. Not people who are self-righteous.

The sick who need the doctor says Jesus in another gospel. And then notice too, verse 43, that he leaves. He spends two days with them, teaching her friends, and then he pushes off.

After the two days he left for Galilee. Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet had no honour in his own country. Get what he's saying? These are verses that we sometimes skip over you know, between the story of the woman of Samaria and the healing of the official son.

But why did Jesus leave that area where things were going so well in personal evangelism? This one lady has become the key to the whole village. Because of the transformation of her life, and she's come into a new relationship, all the others are asking questions. And after two days of that Jesus says bye-bye, I'm going to a tougher place.

They're hard up in Galilee. They're cynical. They know me.

I could have stayed there with those folk. But you know, when I was up in Jerusalem, he's explained to the disciples as they go, I actually sowed a bit of seed among these Galileans. They've all come home from the feast now, back home from Jerusalem up to Galilee.

I'm going to see how my seed is getting on. Don't imagine that evangelists spend all their time reaping. They do some sowing as well.

If there's no sowing, well eventually you'll stop reaping. And there are many times when we get into conversations or we preach, where actually what we accomplish is far more sowing actually even than reaping. But Jesus knows how his harvest is getting on in different parts of Palestine.

And there's a crop to be looked at among those Galileans. And when he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. And they'd seen all that he'd done in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, for they'd also been there.

And so he has some ministry among them. But he's left the Samaritans behind. Who reaped them? You tell me.

Philip, Acts chapter 8. The apostles went down and started reaping what Jesus had already been sowing. Now Jesus in these chapters said, look this is a key principle of evangelism. One sows and another reaps.

That's verse 37. What he's saying is that there are usually a minimum of two people involved in any leading a person to Christ. Takes a bit of time, a harvest takes time to grow.

One person may sow a seed and then go away. And the Lord will lead them to another part of the harvest and maybe they'll do some reaping somewhere else. And you come in and you reap.

Don't think that you did the whole work. You may well reap where someone else has sown. And it's a great mistake to think that we are only doing God's work when we are harvesting.

It's very possible for people who are used in personal evangelism, who are seeing people come to Christ regularly, to think that they are the ones doing the real work and that no one else's part is really worthy of respect. Let's get that quite clear in our minds at the start of this seminar, you know. Jesus was content to do some sowing and then go off and look at another bit of harvest and leave the reaping there to someone else.

Because his father was the Lord of the harvest. Of course he reaped, sowed a bit and went. And we too need to be willing to sow.

Now there are those two stories. I'll come back to Acts 17 later on, probably this morning. But let's ask ourselves now from these two.

What is the gospel? Unless you've got questions about the lady and the tactics with her. I'm sure it's true in Christian work, particularly if you're in an engine room or an office and you have a community life among other Christians, to go from the beginning of the week to the end meeting very few non-Christians. Now I have a number of non-Christian friends and I must say I do know some Christians who regard it as a matter of great sanctification that they have no non-Christian friends.

That would be worldly. It's not sanctification at all, it's a disgrace. We ought to have non-Christian friends.

We ought to be taking care that we meet them somehow. Now it's tougher for the office folk. But this isn't actually a friendship situation is it? This is a flop down and be willing to chat and be flexible about time.

The disciples presumably thought that this was just a sort of one meal stopover. A kind of motorway, turn off, grab the grub and keep going. They found actually that they were staying there for two days, plans shot, two days late in arriving where they were going to be.

But the whole village eventually transformed. I doubt if Jesus had explained it all to them in detail beforehand. This sort of flexibility, meet non-Christians, have them over, be willing to chat a bit, stay around.

It can be terribly annoying, can't it? If there's a father in a family and the whole family are hurrying driving to somewhere and the father pulls into a country garage and starts chatting to the greasy mechanic under the car. And the family are in the car, they're desperate to go on and little Timothy's been sick and Louise is quarrelling with Amanda and the wife wishes this fellow of hers wouldn't always be involved in evangelism. I personally have no answer to that problem.

Other than to appeal that we place a higher priority on friendship with people than our jobs sometimes. Comments, if you have. Yes, we've just had a situation, I'm saying this for the tape now, explained where a wife was being taken out for a special evening with husband.

They're not going to spend a lot of money but just a little something anyway to be private together. And the wretched husband starts witnessing to somebody. The wife's sitting there fuming.

Now that is so biblical. Do you remember in Mark chapter 6 it is, the disciples come back from an evangelistic campaign. They've grown a little bit now, he's not just watching the Lord do it, they've been sent out.

And they get back and they report to the Lord all that they have said and done. I think it says done and said. And Jesus says, well done.

You need rest. Come away with me to a desert place and we'll have some quiet, some rest, you'll be with me. And so they think this is great.

You know the Lord isn't one of these people who is drive, drive, drive, you know fanatical, work, work, work all the time. He wants them to rest. And when they get there, there's a huge crowd of people who've seen them going and got round and got there quicker.

And so Jesus starts to talk to them. And these poor disciples are grumpily sitting there, oh what a fat sort of holiday this is, you know. Preaching again.

My kids get like that, you know, daddy preaching again. And then the end of the day and there's no food. And you remember how he feeds the 5,000.

My belief is that actually watching him do that and then feed miraculously with no resources, exactly the way the the disciples felt spiritually. They had run low in resources. And then they saw the Lord doing a miracle with what they had anyway.

And they each finished up with their own basket full. Told to go and gather it. They'd been waiters at this meal.

And then they were told to gather up the bread. Why? Is Jesus against feeding the birds or is he on an anti-litter drive or something? Well no, I'm sure they then ate of the food themselves. Waiters do eat often of the bits that come back on the on the plates.

And then they went on. It was watching the Lord, listening to him and observing a miracle that accomplished the purpose of refreshment and drawing closer together. So the Lord accomplished the original purpose, even though not exactly in the way that the disciples thought he would.

But it's a crucial thing, isn't it, to have, well we can go to the family seminar, you know, you'll get exhortations there to, you know, to spend time together. It's good, there's a balance. But we must have non-christian friends and a willingness to be a bit flexible.

Now Peter. If you in the year ahead find yourself in an OM situation where you really just aren't making non-christian contacts and you're desperate to do so, then I do hope you'll speak to your leader about that. Maybe you'll want to join some outside organization, maybe the local squash club or something.

And he says there's no money and it's impossible. And maybe you want to just drop me a letter and I'll write to him. I think that's very, very important for OM, that we don't get into this narrow kind of life where we're not really interested in life very much.

We've just got very narrow tunnel vision. And actually when we do meet a non-christian, we don't really know what to talk about because all our mind is on this one thing. Beware of the OM machine, you know, really taking you over.

Make sure you're getting enough of life to be an interesting person. Okay, what is this gospel then that we share as we sit down at Cyprus well or we talk to the greasy mechanic under the car? What is the gospel? Let's turn to Romans chapter 1 where Paul explains this gospel. Romans chapter 1 and we begin at verse 15.

Well, we begin at verse 14. I'm obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and to the foolish. That is why I'm eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

See, first of all, that the gospel is something which is absolutely essential. We don't need to be told this. But Paul feels a tremendous obligation to share the gospel with all men, Greeks and non-Greeks, wise and foolish.

The verse 15 tells me that the gospel is something which is absolutely exciting. Paul says, I'm eager to preach this gospel in Rome, Rome of all places, the seat of power, the seat of philosophy of that day. Paul says, I'm really eager.

I just can't wait to get to Rome to share this great news. That's what the gospel is. It's exciting, thrilling news.

Well, what is the news? Verse 16. I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation. So the first thing about the gospel is that it is the power of God.

The gospel is not the presentation of an idea. It's the operation of a power. The gospel is the power of God.

Verse 17. In the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. So the gospel concerns a righteousness.

The good news is a righteousness coming from God to us. Now, if you know anything about the biography or the life of Martin Luther, you'll know that he struggled for a long time with this issue of righteousness. If you read any of his writings, you'll find him struggling with this particular verse.

What was the righteousness of which the apostle Paul was waiting at this time? It drove him almost to destruction. I've just read a very recent biography of Luther where the biographer really concentrates on this period in his life. Luther almost lost his mind because he was so troubled that he couldn't understand, he couldn't get a grip of what this righteousness was of which Paul is writing.

Until one day he writes, suddenly, by divine illumination, I realized that what was meant here was not God's retributive justice, but that righteousness which God freely imputes, freely gives to the sinner by his sovereign grace on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. This is how Luther actually explained it in his own words. God does not want to save us by our own, but by an extraneous righteousness, one that does not originate in ourselves, but comes to us from beyond ourselves, that does not arise on earth, but comes from heaven.

So the gospel is a message concerning a righteousness which comes from outside of ourselves, from outside of our keeping of the law, from outside of our good works. It concerns a righteousness coming to us from God. And then we find, as we read on, that this righteousness is by faith from the first to the last.

So faith is the kind of coupling, the connector, which couples or connects man's train with God's engine. It's faith that brings these two things together, God's righteousness and our need for connecting, the coupling, is faith. Now if you look at verse 18, you'll see that this righteousness, when it's appropriated by faith, appeases the wrath of God.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. So in order not to confer or incur the wrath of God, we have to receive by faith the righteousness of God. Now if you turn over to Romans 3, verse 21, you'll see how all this actually happens.

We read from verse 21 right through to verse 26. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, although the law and the prophets testified to it. This righteousness comes from God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. This is how it actually happened.

God presented him, Christ Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

So that really is the first part of the gospel. Man is godless, man is wicked. The wrath of God is coming against all godlessness and wickedness.

Man's great need is not happiness, not peace. Man's great need is righteousness. And that righteousness must come from outside of ourselves because all of us have sinned and there's nothing in us which is good.

That righteousness must come from outside of ourselves. It comes from God and is appropriated by faith. Let's just look at one other passage, 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 18.

2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 18 and verse 17 he's been speaking about how you can become a new creature in Christ and he continues, all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting men's sins against them and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us that in him we might become the righteousness of God. I was preaching at Edinburgh University at the beginning of I think it was 1983 the first evangelistic meeting of the new term and I was actually preaching on 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 21 and maybe in the course of the message I would quote it four or five times.

God made him to be sin who knew no sin that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And there was a young lady sitting on the far left of the front row. When I finished speaking she came up to me and she said you know I didn't listen to you at all tonight.

It's always encouraging to have that said to you right after you've finished preaching. I didn't listen to you at all tonight but you said one verse many times. What was the verse? I said well can you tell me anything about it? Yes God and Jesus being made sin.

So I took her back to 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 21 and just read it to her and I'll never forget just clicking her finger there. That's it. I've got it.

That's it. She walked off and I met her the next day and I said what did you mean? That's it. She said well I've been trying to understand the gospel for many years.

She said I've read all the books but I could never understand how God could make me righteous. And it was the words of that verse which finally broke through the blindness. Finally broke through to give her light.

This great truth that through making Jesus sin we can be made righteous in him. But of course the gospel doesn't stop there. Sadly in many evangelical presentations of the gospel the gospel stops at that point.

The point of men being made righteous by faith ready for heaven and so on. But the real gospel, the Christian gospel does not stop at that point. It's not only justification.

There is redemption. And in the gospel there is an offer of freedom. Freedom from slavery.

Freedom from the dominion of sin. Just as much a part of the gospel as the message of redemption. Romans 6, 17 and 18 explains it well.

Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You've been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. One of Paul's great points in the epistle to the Galatians.

And we'll just read three verses from that epistle uh before closing this little section. Galatians and first of all chapter 3 and verse 1. You foolish Galatians says Paul. Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

What was happening at Galatia was this. Paul had gone around and he planted churches and it'd been based on justification by faith and redemption through blood. But false teachers had come in and they were taking these believers back to legalism.

Back to Judaism. And Paul writes to them and I like the paraphrase of J.B. Phillips. He says you dear idiots of Galatia.

Isn't that rather nice? You dear idiots of Galatia. How can you start with faith and go back to law? How can you be released from the dominion the bondage of the law and yet choose in your folly to go back to it? No there's freedom from all that in Christ. And so you go to chapter 4 and verse 4. When the time had fully come God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive the full rights of sons.

Because you are sons God sent the spirit of his son into our hearts. The spirit who calls out Abra father. So you're no longer a slave.

You're a son. And since you're a son God has made you also an heir. Chapter 5 and verse 1. It's for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Stand firm then and don't let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. The gospel is the gospel of the righteousness of God being imputed to men by faith. The gospel is the message of redemption that man who are in slavery to sin can be free from that dominion through the blood of Christ and through the indwelling life of Christ.

Now what actually happens at the point of conversion when man appreciates this gospel and appropriates this gospel to his own life? What actually happens? Well we've seen from man's viewpoint there are two things. There is repentance. There is faith.

But from God's viewpoint you can see in Ephesians chapter 2 there is what we call regeneration. Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and in your sin. That man outside of Christ he's dead in trespasses and sins.

Well what's to happen to those who are dead? Well the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, verse 20 of the previous chapter, raises those also from the dead who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you can see also the idea of slavery there in verse 2. You used to live in the way that you followed the ways of the world, the ruler of the kingdom of the air. There was a spirit at work in those who were disobedient.

All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and so on. Death through sin, slavery through sin, but God regenerates. God gives life by his spirit and breathes into man's dead soul and man is brought to new life in Jesus Christ.

We'll pause there. And then it just draws back from thinking now for a moment about Billy Graham and great preachers and so on. Personal evangelism.

What are some of the objections that people throw up? You know you've got through to them. There's a hunger and a thirst and now they're beginning to wonder is this for me? They've seen something. This is what happens when people get converted.

They see something of God. There is illumination as Peter said. Then are they going to reach out or not? Now they've seen.

And at that moment, Satan will very often throw sand in their eyes. You know I'm sure you know some of the questions that people commonly come back to. Just give me a few so that we know we're thinking about the same thing.

Yes. Why does God allow it? Yeah. Where's Cain get his wife? Yeah I find that usually from you know clever school kids who haven't actually been touched by the power of God yet.

But someone who has actually been touched with what they've seen, they've sensed God convicting them, they will ask other kinds of questions. How can I trust a God I don't know very well is one. Or if I became a Christian I couldn't keep it out.

Or what would my friends think? Now these are questions that arise in their mind from the possibility of becoming a Christian rather than the impossibility. You people ask different kinds of questions don't they? Some ask questions to find answers. Others ask questions in order not to find answers.

You know when you're talking to people, make up your mind fairly early. Are they continuing to ask these many questions? Because they want the truth or because they're trying to prevent themselves seeing any more of the truth? And you know then that your answer, whatever answer you give, is then followed only by another question. Because that's what they're up to.

But when they're beginning to ask questions like this, you know, I tried it once and I'm afraid now because it didn't work in the past. Those are much more true, sensitive questions aren't they? Let's just think about a few of these for a moment. First of all, questions that arise from not knowing God.

How can I trust or how can I step out? I don't know him. The fear of what God might do to them if they became a Christian. That proceeds from not knowing him doesn't it? Now that brings us back to, I forget who it was, I think it was you who talked about Acts 17.

Turn to that for a moment, just have a glance at it. Paul's boldness in Athens, it always struck me as being a message rather like George gets some of his messages. It occurred to him on his way up to the pulpit.

You know, as I was walking up here I noticed a number of different idols standing around. I noticed your objects of worship. I even found an altar with this inscription to an unknown God.

Now, what you worship as something unknown, I want to make known to you. So he's dealing with people who don't know God very well. Modern, secular, 20th century, materialistic pagans.

You don't know God. So do you know whether there is a God? I've got almost no background and believe me the number of these people is increasing. I've taught in school in London and I've met 15 year olds who don't know what the resurrection is.

Who couldn't name one of the four Gospels. You know, growing up in one of the most educated cities on the face of the planet. 15 years old.

I mean they'll be able to vote for the government in two years or three. Go and fight in the army in a couple of years. It'll take another year and they're driving around the streets on a moped, motorbike thing.

But they don't know even that much. So Paul is addressing these folks. And he simply teaches the truth.

Tremendous need for taking time nowadays to preach a kind of teaching evangelism. Just to teach people. Give them something, let them go away and think about it.

It's not like it was in the days of Wesley and even some of these other revivals. Some of you have perhaps been in here to hear of Colin and Mary Peckham's ministry on revival. And I'm conscious that God does come in answer to prayer and I endorse everything they said.

But I remember that the Hebrides had been taught the scriptures. That there was something in the Sunday schools in the background that is simply not there in a modern city in the rest of Western Europe. A number of the revivals that have taken place in this century have been in rural areas basically.

Not so many in the heart of an urban environment. And there is a need nowadays for a teaching kind of evangelism. It's clear, it's loving, it's realistic, it's biblical.

And it gives the people time to think and they come back tomorrow and they can think a bit more. Gradually the fog clears as they hear teaching. Well Paul begins to teach them about God.

And he says three things about God. First of all, he's greater than you think. Verses 24 to 26.

And then from verse 27 onwards he says he's nearer than you think. That takes us through to verse 30. 29 or 30.

And then he says of God he's more active than you think. He's been overlooking ignorance but now he's commanding. Now he's appointed a day.

He has raised a man from the dead. He has already been intervening in history. He's greater, nearer and more active than you think.

So how do we get over the fear of God is simply unknown. Well, I want to suggest three ways. One is we just teach them the truth and give them time.

Stand up for the truth. Don't always expect to reap, you know, the first chapter that I thought I had seen come to Christ when I went to college backslid within a very short time. Subsequently had somewhat of a mental nervous breakdown.

And so far as I know, I've lost contact with him now. Has never really gone on with the Lord. I think I was too eager, too impatient, pushed and tried to pick the fruit before the fruit was ripe.

And it tasted bitter. And he came from one of these totally ignorant backgrounds. What he needed was to have sat down and studied the scriptures regularly, thought about it, come to a few meetings and be given time.

I'll come on to that a little bit more later. But it is so true what's coming up this morning. Our chief weapon is evangelism.

A girl came to see me at a mission I was taking recently in Oxford. And I, every afternoon, give a couple of hours in a room, publicly announce, and people can come and ask questions and argue and debate and do whatever they want, one by one. They've heard the preaching, now they can respond.

And this girl came and she wouldn't give me her name. She was terrified that I was going to put some sort of evangelical hit squad onto her. She came from a Catholic background.

And we talked and talked and talked. And finally, we looked at Matthew in the seventh chapter, the seven on the mount, where the Lord says, look, verses 13 and 14. There's a broad way and a narrow way.

There are two different gates. And the gate comes before the way, in the way the Lord tells the story. I said, look, the Lord explained it like this.

Many folk think that they have to go through life, and they eventually come to the end of it, and they reach a door, and maybe they're right, maybe they're wrong. They've done their best. And that's life.

And you're uncertain to the end of the road, talking to a Catholic. I said, no, no, no, the Lord said it the other way around. First you go through the door, so that you know you're on the right road.

Then you walk the steep road. But you have the assurance, the certainty that you've gone through the right door, at the start, not at the finish. It hit her like a ton of bricks.

And then she came along one night, subsequently, and I think I was talking about the prodigal son. She suddenly saw that he didn't get his clothes and his bath, this prodigal lad, until he came back to the father. He didn't have to get equipped with them in the pigsty before he came home.

He got them when he met the father. And the father actually came running towards him. It's the only time in the Bible that God is spoken of, actually, as running.

When he comes running to meet someone who's coming home. And pig muck and all, he just flings his arms round this boy and clothes him again. And those scriptures just illuminated him.

I had a chap in another mission who came along to an evening meeting. He'd been brought along by a girl who'd got converted. She'd come Monday, gone away troubled.

Come back Tuesday, got converted. I might tell you that she was on the summer campaign this summer, it was a great joy to see her again. She brought a fella on Wednesday.

Boyfriend, you see. And Thursday he'd come again. And he'd listened to the gospel and, oh, anyway, I'm supposed to pray and accept Christ.

And I'm sure he's there, but I don't know what's going on. And he knelt down by his bed and prayed a sort of a prayer. And nothing much happened.

He went to bed, went to sleep, rather disappointed. God woke him up two hours later, wide awake. He climbed out of bed.

He began to read John's gospel. And he read it between about one in the morning and about half past five. And at three in the morning he had a devastating experience.

He'd come to John chapter nine and he was reading about the blind man. And how the man had been healed of his blindness and then the great theological row broke out, you remember, and the Pharisees made a lot of fuss and the man got somehow elbowed aside. And Jesus went and looked for the man.

Verse thirty-five. Jesus heard that they'd thrown him out. And when he found him he said, Do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he? Sir, said the man.

Tell me so I may believe in him. And Jesus with a twinkle in his eye, I mean, can you read it any other way? He said, You have seen him. First man he ever did see.

The man had been blind from birth. And Jesus had given him his sight back. And he looked up and blinked and the first person he saw was Jesus.

And Jesus says, You've seen him. And he it is that's now talking to you. And the man said, Lord, I believe.

And he worshipped him. And this fella, it doesn't mean much to you, maybe, as you sit there. But this chap, Ashley, in Swansea University, suddenly saw that he'd had his own eyes opened.

And those verses, those few verses devastated him. And he came to me, again a little bit troubled, the next day. And he said, Now I don't know what's going on.

I prayed this prayer. I then woke up. I read the thing.

God seemed to speak to me through that. Am I a Christian or not? I said, Well, let's go through it. You've asked Christ to come into your life.

You've read the whole of John's Gospel through in the first night. You've sensed God, particularly speaking to you through some verses, personally to you. I think that's not bad for the first 24 hours.

Oh, yeah. Well, maybe I am a Christian. God spoke through his word.

So a teaching type of evangelism, a patient teaching type of evangelism. And people will begin to recognise the voice of the shepherd. Be patient.

Be patient. I remember a girl in Nottingham University who came along night after night to meetings, would not get converted. Her friends were praying for her.

We were praying for her on the team. And she came and she'd bring a little booklet about how to become a Christian, which I'd given her. She'd bring that and a grubby copy of the Gospel she was reading.

And sit there and listen and drink it all in and then go away. And we came to the end of the week and still no movement. Alice, her name was.

And we knew that it was a boyfriend in London. She was afraid that if she became a Christian she'd lose him. And she just carried on reading the Gospel for weeks and weeks after.

Her friends had almost despaired. And yet God inside was crumbling her resistances away and she was getting more and more thirsty for the reality of the life that's spoken of in John's Gospel. And finally one day in May, this was all three months after the mission, she thought, so I'm going to become a Christian and I don't care what he says.

And she knelt down and asked Christ into her life and was flooded with joy, the sense of the reality that the Lord she had been resisting and reading about had finally come through the door into her life. And that night she phoned her fellow in London to tell him that she'd become a Christian. He had just come back into the house ten minutes earlier from a Louise Palau meeting in London where he'd gone forward.

The very day in which she finally says, Lord, you know, it's you or nothing and I don't care what he says. That day God grabbed him in London. Now I don't know what's happened to the story.

It sounds almost like a fairy tale. I mean whether they have, you know, carried on and got married, I haven't a clue. But you can imagine the sense of the nearness of God in that phone call as they both tell each other of their struggles and what's happened and that the same day God had dealt with many, many miles apart.

So teach patiently, allow God to work, because we have to get clear this thing that's come out already. What's the difference between his work and your work in evangelism? You will never convict anybody of sin. Ever.

No matter how hard you try. I've never convicted anybody of sin in my life. Can't do it.

God won't let me. If I had the power to convict people of sin, when I chose, ooh, I would be impossible to live with. You imagine living with someone who could turn it on, you know.

Sin on, sin on, sin on. God does it. God does it, because he knows everything that can be said for the defense.

He knows how to do it gently. He knows when the time is right. The Holy Spirit convicts us in, he will use you.

But the responsibility for conviction, conversion, regeneration is his. Our part is to preach, to teach as I've said, to pray, to take time, to proclaim, to study with people, to be patient, to be long-suffering, to have an open home, to allow our furniture to be trampled on, and so on. To communicate, to sow, to pray.

He will convict of sin when the time is right. And the other thing that has to be said before lunch is that your life is crucial. I remember reading, I think it was Richard von Braun's first book, locked in a prison cell with a communist or ex-communist, I mean a person from one of those countries, a person who'd been brought up without any knowledge of God at all, locked up with this Lutheran pastor.

And this tortured man asked Wernbrandt one day, look what is your Christ like? I don't know. And Wernbrandt took what to me seems to be an enormous risk. He said to this man, Christ is like me.

Cool. Bold, isn't it? But what else was the man to look at? And he'd seen something of the love and the sacrifice and the purity, the power of Christ in Wernbrandt. It's a bit the other way on, isn't it?

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