

Healing Evangelism

by Stewart Ruch

The work of evangelism is the work of healing, bringing good news to those who are sick and know they're sick.

Duration: 29:12

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, John 5:1-8, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14-15

Topics: "Evangelism"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses how to overcome anxieties about evangelism by understanding it as the work of healing. The speaker uses the story of Jesus healing an invalid in John chapter 5 to illustrate this concept. The first key point is that Jesus goes to the pool of Bethesda, showing us that we should also go to places where there is need. The second point is that evangelism can be messy and relational, and it doesn't always go as planned. The speaker emphasizes the importance of evangelizing within our own families and close relationships, as they are the main arena where we can go to the pool and meet people's needs.

Transcript

Several years ago, I had a chance to visit Pakistan. It was one of the most amazing experiences and journeys of my life. And when I was there, I was taken to a church called All Saints.

All Saints is in a city called Peshawar. And Peshawar is an ancient walled city, much like Jerusalem that we just read about, where there were walls and there were gates in which you would come in and out. And in Peshawar, in this ancient walled city, at the turn of the 20th century, British missionaries came there.

It was a profoundly un-evangelized, non-Christian culture, and they said, we want to bring the truth and the love of Jesus Christ to Peshawar. And so they gathered together with this desire and this hope, and they created a strategy. They said, this is what we're going to do.

We're going to answer the question, who? And we're going to answer the question, how? First of all, who are we going to reach? We want to reach the middle, upper middle class, marketplace Muslims that dominate Peshawar. There was a strong trading class. There were Muslim peoples in that trading class.

They had gained wealth. They had gained influence. And they reasoned, if we can reach these Muslims who have networks and ecosystems that they're a part of, then the gospel will spread throughout this whole ecosystem.

So if we're going to reach Muslims, we're going to build a church that looks like a mosque. As a matter of fact, if you walk right by it, it looks just like a mosque, with one exception, an exception that I'll mention at the end of my sermon. When you walk into the church, there are no images of Christ.

There are no Christian images. As a matter of fact, what you have on the wall is Arabic, very similar to the way mosques are decorated as well. And in Arabic, you have the Ten Commandments posted.

There's a message there. It came from the Judaic scriptures. Muslims recognize the Ten Commandments as well.

And they set about this strategy, and they opened the doors of all saints, waiting for an influx of middle-class Muslim businessmen and women to come in. And very few came. They just didn't come.

They knew it was a church. It might be dressed up like a mosque, but a church is a church. They weren't fooled.

They weren't interested. They had a great job. They had good lives.

Missionaries were devastated. Until another influx began. Word had gotten out on the street, literally the street, among the street sweepers and the toilet cleaners who of the lower Hindu caste that a new Christian church was being established.

And they had heard that the Christians might treat them differently than the rest of the people within the society. And so a few Hindus, probably leaders within their community, were sent to All Saints Church. And what they found were very disappointed British missionaries who were so glad to have anybody come to the doors.

They were absolutely embraced. And they went back and told their friends and said, The Christians treat us kindly. The Christians treat us with dignity.

And they worked their family networks, of which there were many, and literally a revival of conversion of Hindus who were the toilet cleaners and street sweepers of this town Peshawar filled All Saints Church. And one conversion after another. One evangelism joy after another occurred in this church.

It's an incredible story. What God has done through All Saints in Peshawar, Pakistan. And the story continues to this day.

Now I think we're a lot like those British missionaries. In a few ways. First of all, I think that if you're here, and some of you are here and you're not believers yet, you're exploring, you're checking it out.

Others of you are new believers. More and more of you are new believers. Others of you have been believers for many, many years.

If you're here, you are interested in the things of God. You are interested in the things of Jesus. You got up, you came at 9 or 11 this morning, you're interested in the things of God.

And many of you are actually very interested in sharing the things of God. You would like to share about God with others. You want others to know Jesus.

You want others to have a personal relationship with Him, like those British missionaries. And like those British missionaries, you're asking two questions as well. As a matter of fact, I think those two questions, who and how, are actually not just questions, they're anxieties for us.

There are actually significant evangelism anxieties. Who are we reaching? And then if we reach them, how do we reach them? You're asking, who do I reach? Because many of you live within a very kind of developed Christian culture. If you're really honest, on a daily or weekly or even monthly basis, you are never interacting with somebody who at least clearly, from what you can tell, does not have a relationship with Christ.

You're going, who? Who do I reach? Or you're surrounded in the marketplace, in educational institutions, maybe in your family of origin, with people who do not believe. But you're looking at them and you're going, of those people, who do I reach? They don't seem open. Who do I go for? Who do I try to influence for the sake of the gospel? You talk about making friends all the time with people that are in church.

Who? Who? It actually creates so much anxiety in us that we hardly ever get to the how. If we do get to the how, we go, now what do I do? Okay, so I have a friend, they're not a believer. What do I do? You want me to do what you do? You want me to stand up in front of them and give them a 27-minute sermon? Is that what I do? That's weird.

I don't want to get them somewhere. I'm not the kind of person that gets people places. I'm not a persuader.

British missionaries asked the question how as well. They thought they had their how, build a mosque-like church. But what they found is that the work of evangelism wasn't the work of getting somebody somewhere.

It wasn't the work of finding the influencers and the impressive people of the culture and then being even more impressive. It was actually the work of healing. It was actually the work of going and finding those who wanted change.

They wanted restoration, which is what healing is. They wanted to be restored. And they wanted to be loved.

And they wanted something to receive. Because they came asking for something. The work of evangelism is the work of healing.

If you've been around church for a while, you're kind of thinking, Oh, we have the evangelism department, and we have the healing department, and they have different services and different works, and that is an absolute biblical error. There's no evangelism department and healing department in the kingdom of God. The work of evangelism is the work of healing.

The work of healing is bringing good news, which is what evangelism means. They're absolutely integrated. As a matter of fact, when we embrace that evangelism is healing, we then understand who we are trying to seek and serve and love, those who know they need healing, and how, by giving of ourselves and giving of Jesus and never trying to get anything necessarily from them, we can overcome the two great evangelism anxieties by understanding evangelism as the work of healing.

And that's exactly what we get in the work of Jesus with this invalid in John chapter 5. There's two key parts. Jesus goes to the pool. And there he answers the question of who.

He goes to the pool of Bethesda. And second, as we go to the pool, we also then give like Jesus. How? By giving.

Not by getting. Not by persuading. But by giving.

Well, get it with me. Go into the text there you have in your bulletin. Jesus goes to the pool, and like Jesus goes to the pool, so we learn to go to the pool in the work of healing evangelism.

There was a feast of the Jews we read in verse 1 of chapter 5, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. When we go to the pool, we're going to find the pool is messy. It's a messy pool.

Who's at the pool? It is not folks in the latest bathing suits. It's not that kind of pool. There was a place called the Sheep Gate, and there's a pool called Bethesda, which had five roofed colonnades, and in this lay a multitude of invalids.

That's the key phrase to understand the pool. When you go to the pool, you go to the multitude of invalids, both literally and figuratively. What's going on here? Well, we have a gate around a wall around the city of Jerusalem, like Peshawar.

We have gates where you could walk in and out, and there would be pools there, and in this pool there's probably four pillars that create kind of a square, and then a pillar probably in the center that creates kind of a roof, so you come under that pool, and you could get relief from the sun. There's some legend around this pool. It could have been a supernatural reality.

It could have been a natural reality. There's some way in which water would bubble up. Either there was a thought that maybe an angel stirred the water, or scholars have proposed that maybe there was an underground spring, and every once in a while it would bubble as an underground spring does, but there was certainly an understanding that if you could get in that pool when that water was bubbling, you could get healed, and it sounded like there probably were some healings that were happening.

They were sporadic. It was kind of a capricious experience, where you didn't know when you could get in and how you could get in, and if you got in and you got healed, or some got healed and some didn't, but something was going on around that pool, and so it gathered the lame. It gathered the blind.

It gathered the paralyzed. They all came to this pool, and when Jesus went to Jerusalem, he went to go to a feast. That was a major event in the life of the Jewish people.

It happened three times a year. You go to Jerusalem to go to the feast, to go to the temple. When you go to Jerusalem to go to the feast, you go to the temple, and when Jesus goes to Jerusalem to go to the feast, he goes, see? See it? To the multitude of invalids.

He'll go to the temple eventually, but he doesn't go there first. He's actually less interested in going to the temple than he is to go into the multitude of invalids. He actually has kingdom work, his father's work to do, not in the temple first and foremost.

There's work to do there, but actually the first place he goes, before he goes to be with the people who are religious, is he goes to the multitude of invalids at the pool. It's a messy pool. It's a place where people

have all kinds of physical and emotional issues.

We can't quite even figure out this invalid himself. We can't quite even understand what's going on for him. He's been lame for over 35 years, 38 years.

There's a heartbreak in his condition, certainly, and yet at the same time, we don't know. I mean, he tells Jesus, you know, I've just been here. I can't move.

I can't do anything, and that is very likely true as per his condition, but on the other hand, could he have moved or has he made choices in his life that have led to this? Certainly, Jesus teaches in other places that choices in our life don't always lead to physical calamity. You can't point to a physical calamity and say they sin, but he also says at times, choices we make do lead to physical calamities, and it seems implied, leaving the text, that maybe he's made some bad decisions. We're not positive, but this person seems messy.

He seems so messy that after he's healed by Jesus and the authorities come to him to find out who healed him, he doesn't know. He sees Jesus again. He goes back to the authorities, certainly with the knowledge to tell these authorities they weren't asking because they wanted to join the fan club.

He tells them that Jesus healed them, and what are we told? He believes Jesus was persecuted for that. This is a messy person. This is very likely a messy person, and many people at the pool are messy because pools where multitude of invalids gather are messy, and Jesus is like a doctor.

He said, I want the people who are messy and know they're messy. I want people who are sick and know that they're sick. If you're sick and you don't know that you're sick, you're not going to the doctor's office, and then I'm not in business for you.

As a matter of fact, who is Jesus always looking for? If you know anything about the Bible, when you read the first four books of the New Testament, they're all stories of Jesus' life. It's really interesting to ask the question, who does he go to, and who goes to him? He doesn't go to like the British missionaries at first, the upper middle class Muslim marketplace folks. He doesn't go to those who succeeded.

They actually come to him, and when they come to him, he loves them. He gives of himself to them. He cares for them, but he doesn't initiate with them.

Rich young guy comes to him. He's got authority and leadership and power and money. He comes to Jesus.

Leader like a man named Nicodemus comes at night, but he's got incredible authority and influence. He comes to Jesus. Jesus doesn't seek him out.

No, he seeks out a guy named Matthew, extortionist, collaborating with the Roman Empire. He seeks Matthew out. He seeks out a woman right before in this story who is at a well, a woman of ill repute, a woman who's lived an immoral life as a man.

He seeks out a woman very inappropriate within Middle Eastern society as a rabbi. He seeks out an immoral person, very, very, very inconceivable in Middle Eastern society. He goes for her.

He goes for Matthew. He goes for the invalid. He doesn't go to the temple.

He goes to the pool because he's looking for people who are sick and know they're sick. That's the kind of doctor he is. That's how he does evangelism.

But we're often so caught up in trying to get the influencer or the person that we find impressive, we think, well, I guess I've got to reach all the impressive people because maybe they'll impress other people. And sometimes that happens and God does that and ecosystems of impressive people are reached by the gospel, no question about it, but it doesn't seem to be where the initiating energy of Jesus goes. He goes to the pool.

So we go to the pool. That's how we love people. You've got five unchurched friends at the office.

The question to ask right now is who of those five might be a mess and know they're a mess? Who of those five might have a child who has a need and they share it at lunch and now I know and I can pray for their kid? Maybe three weeks I pray for them every day and then I mention to my friend, I'm praying for your kid every day. You've got a need. See, there's somebody that needs a doctor.

You're looking at all times to love those who've come to the place where they know that they need help and the love of God. Now, if those who look like they have it all together come to you, you love them and you talk to them about Jesus, but I'm not sure we put a lot of initiating energy there. Who's another group besides just people that we see in our lives that have a need? There are groups of people like this.

I just read this. There was a study done. 20% of North Americans currently have never met a Christian.

20% of North Americans. U.S., Canada, profoundly evangelized countries for at least two centuries evangelized. 20% have never ever met a Christian.

One out of five. And when you break down those numbers, you begin to understand why. That's 65% of Buddhists who live in Canada and the U.S. 65% of Buddhists have never ever met a Christian.

75% of Chinese, many of them who do not come here with Christian backgrounds, vast majority, have never ever met a Christian. I'm not saying they had dinner with a Christian, had a conversation with a Christian. They've never met a Christian.

75% are Chinese. 80% of Hindus in the U.S. and Canada have never ever met a Christian. And we know they have need because they're immigrants.

They're coming to a country where they don't have the language first. They don't have the established cultural ecosystems by which you get a job. They often earned a degree or had a particular position in their home country.

They come here and they lose all of that. They have a need. That's extrinsic.

We know that. But we know, too, if they're a Hindu or Muslim or Buddhist, they have an intrinsic need. They don't have Jesus.

We should be absolutely, totally clear about that. They don't have Jesus. They don't have Jesus.

They have a need. And they might be more willing in time through love and relationship and care to be honest about that need. In time.

Perhaps more honest than those of us who are native to this country. Another pool. Really important pool.

Your family. You go, ah, my family's a mess. Exactly.

That's the point. For the most part, we know the messes that are in our family. We tend to grow up with these people or at least have holidays with them.

We know where there's a mess. And the truth of the matter is, our families are our main place of evangelism influence. It's like a bunch of folks who've been outside the church.

They came to church. They committed to church. And after they've been committed to church for a period of time, they said, hey, what was it? Who brought you to church to begin with now that you're in church and you weren't in church? 6% said my neighbor.

8% said friend or co-worker. 43% said family member. 43% said family member.

Why do we think that evangelizing our family doesn't count? Why do we think that evangelizing our children doesn't count? Why do we think that bringing a cousin or bringing an aunt or bringing an uncle or sending them an excellent book about the gospel doesn't count? Why do we think that that's all inside baseball and that somehow we're not doing something out there? I don't understand that. That is the main arena where you can go to the pool. They have need.

They know that you know that they have need. They know that you have need. Things get very transparent.

If you're willing to be transparent, they can get very, very real. And that's where you love people. I sent my cousin up.

It was back in the day when there was a thing called Promise Keepers. And there was a whole movement of men. And they were meeting in football stadiums.

He was obsessed with the NFL. So I just sent him some stuff from a former football coach who had written some stuff on the gospel. This guy never reached out to me.

I probably reached out to him. But he wrote me back the warmest email. I can't believe you thought of me.

Thank you so much. I already had a relationship with him. We grew up together.

We shot BB guns through windows. Right? That's a pool. Wheaton students, if you're a freshman, you still think that you're surrounded by Christians at Wheaton.

If you're not a freshman any longer, you realize that isn't the case. So you've got plenty to evangelize on campus. But that said, you are in a Christian culture.

But certainly, you've got a sibling that you're praying for now every day to become saved. Or a mom, or a dad, or a cousin. That's the pool.

That's where there's need. Now, if we're going to go to the pool where it's messy, we have to be willing to get messy ourselves. And evangelism is just messy.

It's just not one impressive person presenting another impressive person. This is how you're saved. Oh, thank you.

I've been wanting to know. Here's how you do it. Oh, thank you.

That's so helpful. And walk away, and you're done. It doesn't ever work that way.

It actually gets messy, and it's highly relational. It never goes the way you want it to go. Catherine and I lived in a neighborhood before this neighborhood, and it was just a neighborhood where folks in the western suburbs, they don't live there unless they have to.

And we had several friends on that street, and we had built some great relationships with people, and we decided to have a Christmas party. And so we invited the alcoholic next door, and he came, and there was a single mom across the street, and she came. There was a person who had a terminal illness and was crippled from that illness, and they came as well.

And we all gathered together and said, hey, we're going to have a white elephant exchange Christmas party. This is going to be so much fun. And everybody brought a gift, and the first gift was opened, and it was a black velvet painting of a seagull.

But immediately, the alcoholic, who was already well-prepared for this party, I didn't serve alcohol at the party, but I didn't need to. He was ready. He came totally drunk, and he saw the seagull, and he said, that's the Holy Spirit! And he started to chant, Holy Spirit! Holy Spirit! All of a sudden, everyone was chanting Holy Spirit, kind of dancing around this black velvet painting of a seagull.

I'm thinking, does this please you, God? I mean, is this what you wanted me to do? You know, this is just weird. And it got worse. The drunk guy got more drunk, even though he not had another drop.

He got more and more drunk, and so by the end, our friend, who was truly an invalid, she had crutches. He took her crutches away as she was leaning against the wall, and he walked about five steps away, and he said, Hey! Stuart's a Christian! Stuart! Make her walk! Come on! You can come to the crutches! Make her walk! That was a very messy experience. It was weird.

It was complicated. It didn't go like we thought, with everyone bowing their heads and putting their hand in the air. I would have loved that.

But several months later, our neighbors right next door became Christians when I shared with them the gospel and an open opportunity after months and months of friendship because they knew that they were sick and they needed a doctor. Another friend who stayed with us for 17 years remained our friend. Still comes, but leaves once or twice a year to Resurrection.

Not there yet. It hasn't crossed the line. Not saved yet, but there.

The pool's messy. It's okay to get messy. As a matter of fact, the way Jesus loved that invalid so much is he emptied himself.

He came right to Earth where it's so messy. And he stepped right in there. And that invalid, he was just waiting for Jesus.

Who else is going to come and say, rise, take up your mat and walk? There are so many people in the pool and they are waiting for you and they are waiting for me. Who else is going to come and bring them the love of Jesus? 80% of Hindus have never even met a Christian who can bring them the love of Jesus. And those invalids are there and they are hungry and they want to be healed.

And they're waiting. They're waiting for Jesus to come in and through us. When Jesus comes, he gives them himself.

He gives. It's not about him trying to get something from that invalid. He gives of himself.

He gives of his life. He gives of his healing power. He gives of his authority.

He comes in and gives of himself. Be free from the thought that somehow when you're evangelizing, you're getting something from somebody. You're giving them the healing power of God.

Nothing less. Very specifically, what are you giving them? What does Jesus give him? Is the first thing that he, does he give him kind of sympathy first? Does he get alongside that invalid and go, man, it must be so hard to be an invalid for 38 years. It must be so miserable.

You can never get in the pool. Does he do that? No. You want to be healed? He gives them a test.

That's how he dignifies them. He gives them a test. You want to be healed? Because Jesus knows that not even Jesus can make someone want to become a Christian.

Not even Jesus can make someone want to be healed. You need to know what the people that you are seeking to love and to the kingdom of God, that there's just even, even the smallest, smallest, smallest opening. And it's okay to test.

It's okay to find out as Jesus did, do you want to be healed? Do you, do you want to know more about God? Because the fact of the matter is, there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds right around us. They do want to know. They are sick and they're looking for a doctor.

So we should test as Jesus tested. I had a dear neighbor, a different neighborhood. Reached out to him for years.

He came to Alpha here at Res. He loved it. Went through 10 weeks of Alpha.

We got together and had lunch afterwards. And I just said, man, you just seem so open to Christ and what Christ is doing in your life. He said, I am.

I totally am. He said, there's a, there's a social moral issue that you as Christians say are really, really important and I can't get around that social moral issue. And I said, look, I said, why don't you receive Christ, continue to read the Bible and we'll continue to talk about that.

He said, man, I want to receive Christ. I said, you know, there's like a bright red line, man. And I said, you need to come under this mission of scripture and of Christ, but you could cross that line this weekend.

You, you could go home and I gave him things to read. I said, go home, read this. And he said, man, I, Stuart, I'm like, I'm like right here, like my feet are right up against that bright red line.

I'm right there. I said, don't do anything right now. Just go home and pray about this.

I thought for sure a text was coming. I thought for sure I was going to hear it. I crossed the line.

I gave my life to Christ. And instead, he came that Sunday to church here at Res. And we had a guest preacher from another country.

And that guest preacher, in a very forthright way, spoke right to the moral social issue that my friend was struggling with. And he gave the biblical teaching on that moral social issue. He gave it in a way that I would have given differently as an American, but he gave it.

He gave it clearly and he gave it biblically. And my friend texted me, not the text I'd hoped I would get. I'm out.

I'm out. If you guys believe that, I'm out. He was tested.

He didn't want to be healed. Not yet. I'm still praying.

I'm still praying. We test. Because we have to know if there is a receptacle, if there is a willingness then to receive the healing of Jesus.

And if the answer to do you want to be healed is even the faintest yes, then we are giving of ourselves in all the messiness and however long that relationship is. I have one friend that I have prayed for for 35 years. So we step in and we just start to give of ourselves.

Not with a particular response that we're asking for. We want them to ultimately respond to Jesus and to be saved by him. But we're giving and we're giving and we're giving and Jesus gives of his authority.

He empties himself. He comes to earth. He gives of himself.

He says, take up that mat, walk, and he heals the man. He gives to that man. And that is what the work of evangelism looks like again and again and again.

As a matter of fact, I'm very, very specific with you. I want to encourage you to find ways to consistently pray for those who are unchurched as God gives you relationship and even the most open of doors. Pray for them.

Tell them you're praying for them. But when you have opportunity, literally pray for them. Pray for their healing.

Pray for their encouragement. Pray for the lifting of a darkness. Whatever it might be.

You may not feel like you can get all the different steps absolutely correct in how it is that they should be led to Christ. That's not as complicated as it appears. But you can certainly pray for them.

And I want to encourage you to start praying for people over the day. The more prayer happens outside the four walls at Resonance Sunday, Monday through Saturday, than inside our four walls. Do you understand what happens when you're being prayed for is you're being healed.

You're being filled up so you can go out and pray for others. You can lay hands on somebody or not and pray for them in the moment much more than perhaps you've ever imagined. And in doing so, you bring Jesus right into that moment and that healing right into that moment.

There was an unchurched woman several years ago. She had a massive headache. She said, I've got a horrible headache.

I was there with two other Christian friends and I said, Can we pray for your headache? She said, Yeah. I have never yet had somebody tell me that I can't pray for them. I don't always lay hands on.

That's not appropriate unless I know them. I've never had somebody say no. I'm sure somebody would.

I'll probably get it like tomorrow now that I've said this. She said, Sure. Laid hands on her.

Headache immediately lifted. It doesn't always happen that way. It's God's sovereign choice.

Immediately lifted. She was staggered. I'm thinking, I mean, He made an elephant.

He made a sunrise. He made sand. He can lift a headache immediately.

She fully came to Christ through a prayer. The healing power of Jesus. We just gave her something.

We didn't have to get something. Let's go to the pool. Go to the pool where those who need a doctor know they need a doctor and then give them the healing power of the great physician Jesus himself.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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