

Assembly Evangelism

by Welcome Detweiler

Welcome Detweiler emphasizes the importance of assembly evangelism and community engagement to effectively share the gospel.

Duration: 39:26

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Topics: "Evangelism Strategies", "Community Outreach"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of delivering the message of God in an interesting and intelligent manner to hold the interest of the audience. The goal is to make newcomers want to come back and continue attending the gospel meetings. The speaker also addresses objections to the idea of keeping the doors open and lights on during the regular meeting time, even if only a few people are present. He suggests that this is a testimony to the angels, demons, and the community that the gospel is still being preached. The speaker also highlights the need for Christians to have favor with all people and not just be known for being hated or persecuted. He suggests that one way to achieve this is by having members of the assembly live near the chapel in the community, representing the assembly well.

Transcript

...familiar portions of the Word of God, Acts chapter 2, for our first reading. Acts chapter 2, reading from verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, reading from verse 5. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and in Achaia, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad, so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." In an overall subject on evangelism, it will be rather difficult if some of these subdivisions will not overlap to some extent. But I think if we take an overall view of the book of the Acts, we will discover that at least a part of that phase of evangelism is that of assembly or corporate evangelism.

Our Brother Little will be touching on the personal evangelism, but I'm going to try to stick as much as I can to the subject of assembly evangelism. My early days were spent in a Mennonite church in eastern Pennsylvania, but for the last 41 years I have been in fellowship with companies of believers that are commonly known as assemblies. As far as I know, I have no reason for changing at this late hour.

I have no regrets to express. I have made some observations during these 41 years, and if I look back over these years from the optimistic angle, I have much for which to praise the Lord. Because of many companies of Christians who have gone into modernism, I am thankful that the assemblies, as far as I know, have been clear regarding slipping into modernism.

So far as the personal work of Jesus Christ is concerned, there is still a clear, defensive message concerning that subject. And so far as the proclamation of the gospel is concerned, I think it is still a very clear, simple message announcing Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners. If I should look over that same area from the pessimistic angle, I perhaps would notice that there is some lack of evidence of progress in the field of evangelism.

At least, we should not be quite satisfied with the progress that has been made so far as winning souls to Christ is concerned. It is impossible to count conversions accurately, but I don't think it's wrong to at least observe as near as we can. And if a survey was made over 1963 to see just how many souls were saved in the assemblies in the United States, I wonder what the results would be.

Let me take a guess that perhaps you would find one conversion per month, twelve per year in every assembly in the United States. If that should be a good guess, then after we have praised the Lord for twelve per year, one per month, we should immediately say, let us not fall into the danger of complacency. That's not enough, and there should be some desire to increase that number.

And I don't think we should say it's the energy of the flesh that is interested in seeing more souls brought to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. If there is a weakness in assembly evangelism, then I think we should say, raise this question, what is the cause and what is the cure? What can be done regarding this situation? Just recently I was speaking to a man and asking the question, are you still seeing souls saved regularly? He said, yes, I just counted up last night, and we have seen seventeen professed faith since the first of the year. And then I counted, and the time, the day that he told me, he was entering the seventeenth week of the year, one per week.

I know a few assemblies in the United States where this is the regular occurrence and has been for a number of years. I also know a few assemblies where it is the rare thing, and there is quite an alarming stress regarding this matter. Now, I wonder if we can analyze and find out if there is something that can be done to change this situation and increase the number of souls that are saved, more or less as a result of the corporate testimony or in the preaching of the gospel in a local church.

Some thirty years ago, quite a number of the assemblies were meeting in rented store buildings, and there were very few, if any, unsaved people coming in, and this was used for the excuse, the reason we are not seeing souls saved. Then in the last thirty years, the Christians have moved out of that store building and have erected some lovely gospel chapels, thanks to the provisions made by Stuart's Foundation and perhaps other agencies who have made this possible. But in these thirty years, there has been quite a good change in the right direction in seeing inviting chapels neatly erected for the purpose of bringing the unsaved in.

However, I have found that in some cases there is a great disappointment while that chapel is being built. The Christians have built up their hopes. They look over those houses that are right around, and they are saying under their breath, when this chapel opens, it might be in order to have a policeman at the door to make them stand in line and come in one at a time, because this is so lovely.

They are living right here, and they should be flocking in. The chapel is built, and on the opening day, they do come in. They look over the building.

But you have gone on now for six months or a year, and you have found it difficult to get anyone in the neighborhood in to hear the gospel. A few months ago, a young man said to me, We are meeting now in a little store building, a gas station and store building it was, only about thirty by thirty, and we're thinking of building a chapel. We'd like you to help us in suggesting perhaps the size of the chapel.

We don't want to involve the Christians in debt, and we don't want to build too small. I had heard just a little bit about the assembly by way of the grapevine, so I asked the young man, I said, Could you tell me what is the main purpose and aim of your assembly? And he thought for a moment, he said, I would say that the main aim of our assembly is to teach Christians how to worship the Lord correctly. We had a young man drop into our assembly, a fine young Christian, and he started to take part at the Lord's table, and he said he was terrible.

He just didn't know how to worship the Lord. And we had to take him aside and we had to teach him. And we're thankful to say that now he does a pretty good job.

He knows how to worship the Lord intelligently. But I would say that the main purpose of our assembly is to teach Christians how to worship the Lord accurately. And after that answer, I said, Now, I think regarding the size of your chapel, this gas station that you have is exactly what you need.

At a conference not too long ago, one of the sessions was spent in this overall subject, keeping the balance. And we generally recognize that in many of our assemblies, there are a number of purposes. One is that of worship, one for the teaching of God's word to Christians, a prayer fellowship, and a gospel meeting or a gospel outreach.

And if you were to take a bird's-eye view of the Acts, I wonder if you wouldn't find that there is a very heavy emphasis put upon evangelism as you read through that book. And I'm afraid there are perhaps some assemblies who are not seen so, say, because when it comes to the aim of the assembly, there is an imbalance of objective. And there is this idea of putting one thing ahead of the other.

I have been in two assemblies in my lifetime when the largest meeting of the week was the Lord's Supper. Chairs were carried in for the Lord's Supper. They didn't need more than about half of their auditorium the rest of the week.

I don't know how many souls are being saved in those two assemblies, but I shall not be at all shocked to hear that there are very few souls saved. Now, it may be well for us to ask ourselves this question, what priority do we give in our assembly this outreach of getting the gospel to the folks in the neighborhood? Maybe I should raise this question, what is an assembly gospel meeting? What is it? A few years ago, a young man took me around to see some of the sights of his city and he said, I would like to take you out and show you my father's grave. His father was a very famous evangelist.

And while we stood at the grave, he said, you know, my dad was an unusual gospel preacher, wonderful gospel preacher, but he preached most of his sermons to Christians and empty benches. And I thought that's a strange thing for a son to say of his father, but I think he was sincere. He recognized that his father preached a clearer gospel.

Will you allow me to say that to have an assembly gospel meeting, it means that you have to have unsaved people in the audience listening to the gospel. In a state that is a thousand miles from here, so I can use the illustration, the gospel meeting came down to less and less and less and less until it was three or four people. And the question arose, should we close our Sunday night gospel meeting? There were some objections.

In order to be a witness to the community, let's open the doors at the regular time and put on the lights. And those three or four people sat for one hour in that building with the lights on. When the hour was up, they turned the lights out and went home.

A testimony to the angels, a testimony to demons, a testimony to the community. We still have a gospel meeting. So far, I haven't led an angel to the Lord, nor a demon.

Now it is possible that I'm not criticizing. Maybe that's the right thing to do. But I simply want to bring to your attention, in my observation, these things do exist.

The verses that I read in Acts chapter two, I have heard quite a number of sermons on this portion of the word of God. As far as I can recall, in every case, the clock beat the preacher, and before he got to the 47th verse, his time was up. And just to make up for those occasions, I want to select that as my text, the 47th verse of Acts chapter two.

This is the very young apostolic church, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church monthly. I'm giving you the reverse vision.

Daily. That's right. So when I mentioned a moment ago, if the survey should show monthly, that's not enough.

And if there are a few who can say weekly, that's not enough. Here it is. And the Lord added to the church daily.

There's a good objective. Such as should be said. Praising God.

Here's something very essential to a gospel testimony. But when you stop praising God, you just go through the motions. But a happy soul who is praising the Lord will find it easy to have a gospel witness.

But this other thing, and having favor with all the people. There's a verse over in 2 Timothy 3 verse 12 that you know very well. Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

From that verse, people have deduced that the only way you can be a spiritual Christian is if all the people in the neighborhood hate you. And if they don't hate you, it's doubtful that you are spiritual. Now, that being the case, there are some, there's a bit of confusion in the Bible.

1 Samuel 2 and verse 26, And the child Samuel grew, and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men. Speaking of Samuel. The last verse of Luke chapter 2, speaking of our Lord Jesus, and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

The early church, praising God and having favor with all the people. Now, this is my, the main part of my subject. I believe the difference between assemblies that are seeing unsaved people coming in regularly, all the time, new faces, is a matter of gaining favor with the people.

The word propaganda is very often used in the bad sense. The moment the word is mentioned, it's something bad. Nothing wrong with the word.

In a given community where a chapel is erected, a testimony for the Lord, you cannot help but people start talking. Questions are raised. What's this new building? I don't know.

Is it Baptist? Is it Methodist? I don't know. They tell me it's off brand. I don't know what it is.

And in a little while, there are rumors going around. Propaganda. It is very important that you get control of that propaganda, and have the good propaganda going out instead of the bad.

And how do you do it? I think there's something that assemblies have overlooked, and I want to press this upon you, because if you were to ask me for some suggestions when you build a brand new chapel, I would say one of the essential things to do when you move into a new community is to ask, in the fellowship of Christians, do we have one or two or three families who are willing to sell their house and to buy one within a block or two of the new chapel? Now, be careful who that person is. It's not just some leftover, but a good representative of the assembly. Last summer, I was preaching in a certain town where we had about ninety people out every night to hear the gospel and hot weather, and I don't believe there were more than ten or twelve cars in the parking lot.

You could stand out on the front door of that chapel, and you could say, the folks from that brick house come, from that two-story house they come, the folks from this house and those three houses right there, they come, they're walking to the chapel. That's what you have in mind when you erect a chapel. You are doing it to get the community in.

You have to have the favor of the people. I was in another city preaching the gospel. We had just about the same crowd, a larger assembly, and I asked the Christians, who is this? But he went in and the preacher welcomed him in and took it and said, yes, he said, I'm rather new here, but I see your chapel down there.

I've been interested in my visitation. I haven't met anyone in our community here that attends that chapel. No, he said, I guess not.

We see cars pull up and people drive in, and you must have a nice-sized congregation, but not one soul in the community. Let's get into these communities and find out what the propaganda is. What about that chapel up there? I don't know.

It's some kind of a, it might be Jehovah's Witness. I don't know. You just can't find out.

Now, if a representative Christian, a good, solid Christian, lives in that community, as close to the chapel as possible, then people can say, have you been to that holiness church? What do you mean, holiness church? That chapel up there. Yes, I've been. And by the way, it's not a holiness church.

Oh, I thought it was. You've been? Yes, and I liked it. I'd like you to go with me.

Oh, fine. You know, the Joneses here, they go there all the time, and they're the best neighbors in our whole block. By doing that, you can gain this favor among the people.

And I love to see this emphasize that in order to get the favor of the people, we must have Christians who are willing to represent that assembly and live as close to the chapel as we possibly can. But there are a number of other things that are necessary, perhaps, to gain this favor. First of all, I would suggest that when the people do come in, because there are always a few that come out of obligation, I wonder what their impression is when they come to the place.

Do you have someone to greet the people? It is quite possible that if no one has been designated for this work, no one will do it. And the person will be able to say, I was in there, and I was out, and I didn't meet a soul, not a soul. I don't think there's anything wrong in having an official greeter appointed for that work.

And be very careful who you select for that, because what he says and what he doesn't say is very important. I happen to know of an assembly where a brother saw this need. He observed that there were people coming into the family Bible hour, and not a soul met them.

So he said, I'm going to meet them at the door. And he stood at the door and shook hands with everybody that came in. Do you know what happened? On the way out, one of the Christians said, Good morning, pastor.

He got the hint. He knew it wasn't the right thing to do. But I do think that Christians or strangers who come in are impressed by friendliness.

And if you can teach the Christians to definitely or intentionally sit with strangers, and to make them feel at home. I've seen occasions when there was a row full and a row full of strangers in that row, and not a soul sat with them. And the people did say, I guess they found out we had onions for supper, or something.

They wouldn't sit with us. Put yourself into that case. It would be good for you if you have a night off sometime to go to another church.

And just for the sake of noticing these incidentals, and asking yourself, did I like it? What impressed me? What caused me to think the very opposite? I think it's good for us to put ourselves in the shoes of the people. Again, I suggest that this official greeter must be a man of wisdom. Because it's possible that some person will come in and say, yes, I'm in the neighborhood, and we are members of the First Methodist Church, but we just thought we'd visit.

Oh, you're Methodist. By the way, if you have time some night, I'd like to come to your house and bring my Bible and show you that the Methodists are unscriptural. Oh, yes.

Isn't that being faithful to the Word? Yes. That official greeter must be able to handle the public and be able to make the person feel, well, I felt at home when I came to the place. Now, dare I touch on the

speaker? The man who is on the platform, remember that this man who dropped in, these strangers, came perhaps slightly out of obligation, and they are going to observe all these things.

Did you have a preacher on the platform or a practicer? Did they go home and did they say, well, I guess if the fella keeps on maybe five years, he'll make it. But he's evidently just learning. You'll have to make a decision regarding this.

Is your gospel platform a practice ground, a proving ground, or is it a place where you want someone to present the message in an interesting manner so that that person will enjoy the service? I would say that your speaker needs to be able to hold the interest of his audience. He needs to be able to get the message across with some intelligent manner and an interesting manner, and above all, he must want that person who came in for the first time, he must want him to say as he goes out, I'm coming back. And that's a pretty big order.

It's not sufficient to get that stranger into your building once, but the service must be conducted in such a manner that he will want to come back, because there are not too many people that get saved the first time they hear the gospel. One more question. Can that visitor be assured that he will always hear a good message, or does he come and hear a certain preacher and enjoy him, and then there's an off night? Oh, it was terrible.

It was terrible. And that person says, if you'll let me know when Brother Lieberstrom preaches, I want to come. I love to hear him, but I don't want to come the other night.

Do the Christians who want to invite their friends, do they have to say, first of all, I want to find out who's going to speak on Sunday night, then I'll invite my friends. This shouldn't be necessary. There should be that confidence and that propaganda in the community where the people will say, I've been there a number of times, I've heard a lot of different preachers, but they're all good.

They all present an interesting message, I've enjoyed it, and I want to go back. Besides the preacher, your master of ceremonies, who may be the tongue leader, whatever he may be, he must create a friendly atmosphere, because this critical person is going to decide whether he's coming back by the speaker and by the person who precedes the speaker. The first time that I went to a Billy Graham meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, I went with a very slightly critical attitude, because I had been to some Youth for Christ meetings where the froth was so thick that you couldn't find anything else but that.

And I observed, I want to see this service go through. And one of the things that I said when I walked out of the building, I said, that was a combination of liveliness coupled with dignity. I like it.

No one could say, my, that was a dry old preaching service. There was life in the meeting, but there was no froth there. It was coupled with dignity.

And I believe the American people like to come into a service where the entire service has an atmosphere of liveliness, but also with dignity. We have learned from the conference thus far that the message does not need to be changed, and I have proved that. You can preach everything directly from the scriptures and hold back absolutely nothing.

That's not going to keep people away. The means and methods that are used will have to be changed. I don't go to the book of the Acts to find out the best method in gaining the favor of the people.

I don't even go to last year's issues of letters of interest to get that. I want to be up to date. And I would like to say that perhaps the things that will work in the United States today, and will bring people in, will not work five years from now.

It's quite possible. In fact, some of these suggestions that I have made may not be used in every state in the Union. I'm speaking now from a local standpoint, and from my observation, I would say that maybe in your area these will not work.

If we go back again to observe means and methods used over the past years, there was a time when open-air meetings were very productive as far as getting the gospel out. I think they still are in certain areas of my city. I could say you wouldn't accomplish one thing.

In fact, you would hurt your gospel testimony if they saw you out in the street corner, because nobody stands out in the street corner except crackpots. And that's in the minds of the people, and because I know that, there would be a number of people that would never darken the door of our chapel if they saw me preaching on the street corner. That is not true of other cities.

There was a day when tent meetings were in order, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if tent meetings are still in order in certain areas. They would be of no value in our part of the country, because associated with that tent is something that's very fanatical. There were those days when you would hold eight weeks of gospel meetings in a chapel.

You had to hold four to thaw out the frozen Christians. And then the last, from then on, souls were coming in and being saved. There may be some areas where you can still do it.

It doesn't work in our city. We couldn't hold eight weeks of gospel unless you just wanted to go through the motions. But there are some new things that are being introduced, and you have heard of them.

There are coffees being used for the glory of God, where housewives meet in the morning for a Bible class and the gospel is being preached and souls are being saved. There are craft classes. There are Bible clubs.

There are various cottage meetings and many, many things that can be used to contribute to this one thing that the assembly is getting--the gospel out. The possibilities are unlimited. I remember reading a little suggestion from Charles Spurgeon on Mark 2. The statement is, "...faith is full of inventions." And I think there should be, in every assembly, a man who is in the research department, who is continually figuring out what more could be done.

What could we explore to still further reach out with the message of the gospel? I am not suggesting that the assembly gospel meeting is the number one thing, but I don't like to see it go to pieces because I believe there is still an opportunity of the public preaching of the word of God. And if we gain the favor of the people, they will come in, and it's wonderful to have an audience of sinners to preach to. When I am invited to preach the gospel in a place and I am told there will be no one there but just Christians, we never get any unsaved people out, I decline.

I'm not saying that I'm right and everybody else should do it, but I believe that when the meeting is announced as a gospel meeting, and you want the message addressed to sinners, you should have sinners in the audience to listen to the gospel. It takes all my liberty away from me when I am told everyone in here is saved and on the way to heaven, but given the gospel, I have difficulty. Give me blinds

or dark glasses and let me pretend that's the only way I could do it.

Now, I don't know whether I have given you enough to start that discussion. I certainly haven't covered all of the possibilities that are available for assembly evangelism, but I want to stress once more that the early church was having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. There is always the possibility of going to an extreme, and I guess it would be possible for an assembly to go overboard on gaining the favor of the people so that the meeting might be, well, they could have a clown on the platform, and you could certainly get the people in then.

Gaining favor with the people and with the Lord, you have a dual responsibility. You must be kept in within the obligation that you have in presenting the message for the Lord, and also gaining the favor of the people in the community. In my observation, I have discovered that the souls that are saved in special effort meetings, as compared to those that are saved in the regular meetings, just week by week, continually, the quality of the conversions of those that are saved outside the special meetings is slightly better.

And that's why I would like to see the message of the gospel going forth week by week, and souls coming in, new faces coming in continually, and as a result of hearing the word, here one, there one, the next day, souls being saved regularly. I found that during the time of special meetings, there is this disadvantage. When being saved becomes a popular thing, we found that it can.

And we don't want to judge motives, but there is the possibility that some people will follow suit. Well, he went, so I'll go too. This doesn't happen when you have the regular services and the gospel effort going forth.

That Thessalonian church was given praise by the Holy Spirit from you sounded out the word of the Lord. It went into the outlying districts. And I trust that the desire from this company of men is that in days to come, it can be said of every assembly that we represent, that the Lord could say it and say it honorably from you sounded out the word of the Lord in Macedonia, in Achaia, and out into the outlying districts.

May God bless his word, and shall we pray. Our gracious Father, the subject that has concerned us today is one that concerns thee infinitely more. It is not any pleasure to thee that souls should perish, thou art so desirous that souls will be saved.

And if our eyes have been closed to any means and methods that we could use to reach more souls for thee, we pray that thou wilt make us alert to thee. May we never reach that place of complacency, nor ever the place where we shall be defeated, but rather looking to thee and remembering that the gospel is still the power of God unto salvation and meets the need of the human heart. We do pray thy blessing on this service and on the discussion that shall follow.

And upon everyone that is here that is interested in the proclamation of thy word in this corporate way, we ask in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10175.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/welcome-detweiler/assembly-evangelism/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net