

Jump Start

Week 6: Meeting the World

I. Introduction: Meeting the World

Over the past five weeks, we've covered everything from being saved by God to how God speaks to us, how we talk to him, and what should characterized our lives together as a local church family. So far, we've focused primarily on what takes place between us and God or between us and other Christians. Today, we switch gears a little bit in the sense that the relationship on which we focus today is the one between us as Christians and "the world," or those who don't know Christ.

Our theme today is: Meeting the World.

As we consider how Christians "Meet the World" there a few key things, among many, that you, as a new Christian, should recognize about yourself:

First, you should recognize that you are called to be in the world but not of the world. That's a statement you may have heard before, but....

Q: What in the "world" does this mean?

A: That phrase is taken as a summary of John 17. What is meant by word "world" when it says "they (disciples) are not of "this world," refers to that which is not part of God's kingdom; that which is perishing, has no hope, and will ultimately be judge. If you could boil this statement down to its core, essentially it means this: God has placed us as Christians in this world to live, to work, to be productive --- not ultimately for ourselves but to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to work for His purposes.

Secondly, and a little more specifically, this means that, as a Christian, you are now a member of God's eternal kingdom...

So, while we continue to live in this physical world, which is still marred by sin and unbelief, we are part of an eternal kingdom that is advancing now and that will be fully realized when Christ returns to judge the world.

Finally, as those who have been set apart and are participants in God's eternal kingdom, in your thinking and actions you are now to be conformed to Christ, NOT conformed to the world. Paul follows this line of thinking in Romans 12:2. There he writes, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Again, the "spirit of the world" Paul refers to is the spirit of sin, with all of its lies, deceit, and futility, that still dominates all those who remain in their unbelief. Paul says, don't think and live like those who are governed by the spirit of the world because you belong to God's kingdom and have been given a new life with an eternal direction and purpose.

So those old, futile, and ultimately shallow ways of thinking about life and its meaning, whatever they may be, have been replaced by an entirely new way of thinking and living --- one that continues to be formed by God's Spirit and is concerned with His purposes. We've been given eternal hope, direction, and purpose in our lives.

And with our entry into God's kingdom, we are not merely passive recipients of all the associated benefits and rewards, but are active participants in advancing God's kingdom. In other words, every Christian's primary vocation is as a Kingdom worker.

This brings us to the specific of how we as Christians should meet the world. The goal of this class is to highlight the importance of how we live before others that don't know Christ, and then, more specifically, the importance of sharing the Good News of Christ with those who are lost.

Any questions, before we move on?

II. Meeting the World: Living Faithful lives

As noted a few moments ago, Christians are part of God's kingdom and we have been called to bear witness to God's truth and to reflect His glory to the world around us. As a result, we are to live lives that are distinct from the world? Ultimately, we are concerned that we glorify God. That's our primary concern and what motivates us.

Now, important for our class today, our lives bring glory to God in part because they stand out and in doing so hold out hope to those who don't yet know Christ.

So, as you'll notice on your handout, we just want to briefly discuss some ways that our conduct, how we live in this world glorifies God and sets us apart from non-Christians.

The first thing to note is...

Our speech...what we talk about and how we talk about it.

Q: How should our speech set us apart as Christians?

A: Our speech should be noted for what it is and what is not...

It should not be corrupt, or used for gossiping, backbiting, or tearing down others down. In Ephesians 4, Paul exhorts Christians to not let any unwholesome talk come out of the mouth. This exhortation is made as Paul is contrasting the old self versus the new self in Christ.

I imagine that if you've worked in the world for any amount of time, you've seen first hand how frequently speech is used to tear others down. Or generally, you've seen how unedifying conversation can be among co-workers. As Christians, our conversation shouldn't be characterized by these things, and if it's not, we will stand out.

On the other hand, our conversation should be marked by things that are edifying. In Colossians 4:6, Paul “let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” The idea here is that what we talk about, and how we talk about it should be different than those who don’t know Christ. Not only should our speech not be corrupt, but ultimately it should be edifying and encouraging.

There are lots of ways to measure ourselves in this area. We should, at the very least, examine what we talk about and how we talk about it. Are the words we speak consciously encouraging to others? Are they morally questionable? Will they lead non-Christians to be curious about you and perhaps what you believe?

Speech is a powerful way that we can distinguish ourselves from the world and reflect the hope we have in Christ.

The Second thing, I want to note, is our actions. If you go to a Church like CHBC, and people generally know you’re a Christian, they WILL watch your actions. Ultimately, our speech, no matter how wonderfully Christian, will be meaningless unless our actions also reflect the hope we have in Christ.

Generally, there are a couple of things to consider in terms of how are actions should distinguish us as Christians...things that will be most noticeable to a non-Christian.

First, I think specifically, our upright living should stand out. I don’t use the term upright living in any self-righteous or falsely pious way. In I Peter 4, the apostle writes that the Christian is done with sin, so he doesn’t plunge into drunkenness and other sins. Consequently, non-Christians think that Christians are strange. This principle applies to many types of sinful behavior. But the point is that there is generally, or at least should be, a difference between our behavior and those who don’t know Christ. What we find enjoyment in different things and ultimately more satisfying things.

Secondly, our good deeds. We noted in the second Class, *Living by God’s Ways*, that Christ has called us to do good works. Again, this includes many things. One way our good deeds should be manifest to non-Christians concerns how we treat and serve other believers. In John 13 tells His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” The command to love applies to all Christians, and one intended effect of that command is be witness to non-Christians.

Another way our good deeds should be manifest, is in the good that we exhibit towards even those who may be our enemies? As Christians, we are enabled to love and serve those who don’t like us or try to hurt us because we understand something of what God has done for us. If you want to astound a non-believer who maybe has not been particularly good to you, go out of your way to do something good for them. In doing so, you’ll display the sort of love God has for us and it will be a powerful witness for God’s glory.

The final thing to note is Faithfulness in our vocation. This is especially important because work is where the majority of us will interact with non-Christians.

Q: What are some ways that we can glorify God and bear faithful witness to God in our work?

A: By being diligent, reliable, honest --- especially, if we've done something wrong, our willingness to own up to it, while professionally painful, can be a powerful witness to non-Christians co-workers.

Ultimately, we know that we are working, not for man's approval, but to glorify God. This frees us from many of the temptations to cut corners, be deceitful, or wrongfully ambitious, that we may face at any given time.

Well, in all these and other ways that we meet the world, the goal of all that we do and how we live is captured best in Jesus' own words. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus tells His followers, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven."

Any questions?

III. Meeting the World with the Good News

Ultimately, however, we are called to do more than merely live a good life, one that speaks well of God and His children. We are, in fact called to share the message of the Gospel, or the Good News, with those who don't Christ. The word commonly used for this activity is evangelism.

Just to be clear we know exactly what we mean, let me ask you the questions...

Q: What is evangelism?

A: Biblically, evangelism is simply articulating the gospel of Jesus Christ and the claim that the gospel puts on people to repent and believe.

So at its most basic, evangelism is the process of verbally sharing with someone how they can be reconciled to God and have restored fellowship with Him.

You may have heard the statement: "Share the Gospel with others, and, if necessary use words." While I certainly appreciate the importance that statement gives to how we live before others, it, nonetheless could be misleading if it leads us to neglect the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. Scripture is clear that the Gospel fundamentally involves content, a message, that must be accepted by someone if they are to be saved. People may rightly admire our lives, but if they never hear and accept the premise for why we live they way we do, then we've not done them much good.

According to Jon Cheesman in his book, *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, "To evangelize is to declare on the authority of God what he has done to save sinners, to warn men of their lost condition, to direct them to repent, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Why Should We Meet the World with the Good News?

Now that we have an idea of what evangelism is, we want to discuss why the discipline of evangelism is important to the Christian life --- essentially, we want to answer the question: Why should we evangelize?

You'll notice there on your handout there a few things mentioned:

First, it's commanded, therefore, it's a matter of obedience. Evangelism isn't simply for a few privileged Christians who have outgoing personalities. All Christians have the privilege to spread the good news, using whatever gifts God has given them.

To support this point, we should note that Christ Himself commands evangelism. In Matthew 28:18-20, He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Given the scope of the effort alluded to by Christ --- the ends of the earth; and given the time frame alluded to --- the end of the age --- it seems that Christ here is giving a command that is binding to all His followers from the beginning of the Church to the end of history. So, He's not just commanding his handful of disciples, but all of His disciples. As Christians, we are ALL commanded to do evangelism by making disciples. Consequently, the command in itself is designed to elicit obedience from us.

Particularly as a new Christian, you should view evangelism as a part of what it means to follow Christ, much like praying to God and committing yourself to other believers.

Secondly, Evangelism is how God carries out His plan to call people from all nations/peoples to glorify Him in redemption. In Romans 10:13-15, Paul underscores the commonsense of evangelism: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

If salvation involves acceptance and obedience to the message of Christ, then it makes sense that the message must be proclaimed if there are to be conversions. Think about your own conversion, most likely you came to know Christ because someone was faithful in sharing the good news of Christ. So, God's plan to redeem even you, was most likely a result of the message of salvation being proclaimed by someone.

Thirdly, it reflects the same love and compassion that Christ Himself had for the lost. In other words, we should evangelize out of love for the lost, and, in doing so, we become Christ-like.

In Matthew 9:36, we read that Christ, in “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.’”

Jesus' love and compassion for people motivates Him to urge His disciples pray for more workers to reap the harvest.

Finally, we should evangelize because we love God. Jesus says in John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. Love for God will result in a desire to obey His commands and promote His glory by gathering more worshippers and making more disciples.

Again John Cheesman, in *The Grace of God in the Gospel*, writes, “Love for God is the only sufficient motive for evangelism. Self-love will give way to self-centeredness; love for the lost will fail with those whom we cannot love, and when difficulties seem insurmountable. Only a deep love for God will keep us following His way, declaring his gospel, when human resources fail.”

Any questions?

If it's a matter of obedience and it helps us grow while furthering God's kingdom...

Q: Why is evangelism difficult for us to do, particularly if we are new Christians?

Fear of man. Undoubtedly, we all know the fear of man to some extent. Such fear can prove especially debilitating when it comes to sharing the gospel. This especially true for new Christians who may have good friends or family who don't know Christ, and will likely have difficulty understanding the change in your life. In fact, they may not like it at all.

Fear of inadequacy (lack of knowledge). I think this one of the biggest obstacles preventing us, particularly, new Christians. It's easy to let a fear that we won't be able to answer all the questions some one may direct at us. Therefore, we simply don't engage with people in a way that lends itself to share the Gospel. Or we may still think ourselves to unworthy because of our sin to share the Gospel.

Too busy / lack of concern. This is perhaps the most serious indictment of why we may fail in sharing the Good News with others. If it weren't such an obvious indictment against Christians, it would almost be inconceivable that, having been given a new life in Christ, we could somehow fail to share the Gospel simply because we're too distracted or disinterested. But the fact is, life, especially in city like DC, goes 100 miles per hour, it's very easy to lose sight of why we are here and our duty to share the gospel with others.

There are likely many more reasons we could give and will be tempted to give throughout our lives as to why evangelism proves difficult for us. However...

As Christians, we must realize that if evangelism is a primary way that God brings people to Himself and, therefore advances His kingdom, then *Satan will use everything at His disposal to keep us from sharing the Gospel.*

So, as you consider your own obedience in evangelism, you should pray that God would give you insight and deliverance from those impediments to your obedience.

Important things to remember in our evangelism

Faithful Evangelism is fundamentally about content. As you seek to be obedient in evangelism you may come across evangelistic aids that are heaving on techniques to get people to make a “decision” for Christ. But fundamentally, our job as an ambassador for Christ is to proclaim the message of Christ. And ultimately, however you choose to engage with a non-Christian, resist the temptation to be ambiguous as to what following Christ means and will entail.

Without the message of Repent of your sins and believe in Christ and walk in newness of life, there is no Christian message. If you read in Acts about Paul’s evangelistic efforts Everywhere Paul goes, he proclaims the message of God’s claim on our lives, our need for repentance and faith in Christ.

So, as you have opportunity to share the gospel with a co-worker or family member, be as clear as you can about the message of the gospel (Reference two ways to Live outline). As well meaning as we may be, we will do people a great disservice in our evangelism if we are not clear about what the Gospel entails; when people “Christians” and they don’t understand what really is, what they’re being saved from and why Christ died for them.

Along these same lines....

Your testimony in and of itself is not evangelism. This might at first glance seem controversial. We certainly don’t want to undervalue the importance of how one was converted and the difference that Christ has made in their life. In Acts 26, Paul makes great use of his conversion story and his life in Christ when He stands trial before King Agrippa. But, importantly, he doesn’t stop there, but goes on to talk about the message he was entrusted to tell others. He lays out the gospel.

We live in a culture where the individual experience is the final authority. To merely talk about our experience without a clear presentation of the gospel message, may lead to a response like the one I got from a co-worker a while back: “That’s great for you, I’m really interested in Buddhism.” Somehow, we’ve got be clear about how our experience relates to the specifics of the Gospel.

Thirdly, how you live matters. This simply reinforces our discussion earlier of the importance of how we live. In his book *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, Don Whitney writes, “The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God’s Word by one who is living God’s Word.”

While the change in how we speak and act since our conversion is never enough to faithfully evangelize, it is the best, most authenticating tool we have when it comes to sharing the Gospel. Our lives either authenticate or seemingly invalidate the Good News to the world.

Finally, we should emphasize that God does the converting. Remember there's a difference between God's job and your job. Our job, as Romans 10 makes clear, is to preach the Gospel message faithfully, but God, through his Holy Spirit, does the converting. This truth should reinforce our dependence upon God as we realize that the fact that any of us have been brought from darkness to light is a miracle of God.

And ultimately, that God does the converting should give us great comfort as we share the Gospel. If you have an unsaved friend or family member that is not open to Christ, you can have complete confidence that God has the power to change them. No one is beyond hope.

It should also relieve the burden we sometimes place on ourselves to see others come to Christ. Don't confuse your job with God's job. Even as imperfect as our words might sometimes be, we can have confidence that God can take those feeble words and turn them to his glory in another's salvation.

The last thing we will discuss today is some...

Practical considerations to help us be faithful in obeying God's command to share the good news

Read good books to help you be effective in evangelism. Two great resources are *Speaking of Jesus*, by Mack Stiles (helpful ways to turn the conversation to Christ), and *Tell the Truth*, by Will Metzger (what is the message that we are to communicate). Another, perhaps a little more academic, book is J.I. Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (understanding God's role and our own role in salvation).

Attend the Evangelism core seminar taught by Ryan Townsend. This is a great class to help equip you with the mindset and the tools to effectively share the gospel with others.

Pray for opportunities to evangelize. I know I've found in my own experience that there is a strong correlation between praying for opportunities to share the gospel, and opportunities actually coming to pass. That must in part be because of God's faithfulness in answering prayer, but it is also likely a result of simply being more aware of the opportunities. Most likely, opportunities are all around you, the question is whether you see them. So pray that God would give you the eyes to see the spiritual needs of those around you. And then, like Paul exhorts Christians in Colossians 4:5, Make the most of every opportunity you have.

Be patient and be persistent. Most evangelism takes place over a long period of time, not in one sitting. While you should be ready to lay out the gospel (*Two Ways to Live*

Outline), don't feel like a failure or give up in hope if you don't cover everything all at once. We live in a post-Christian era, where most people we'll meet and talk to have a lot of spiritual and intellectual debris that needs to be cleared. Of course, God can change hearts in an instance upon hearing the gospel. But often it takes time and effort to get to the point where people really even understand the implications of the Gospel.

So be patient and persistent, and again, continue to depend upon God in prayer for opportunities.

IV. Conclusion

That concludes our discussion this morning. Next week discuss the theme: Living in Hope.

Pray