

ESSENTIALS OF EVANGELISM

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by

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CHAPTER NINE

WHAT IS CLOSEST TO THE HEART OF JESUS?

TEXT: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

If you and I could sit down and talk for ten minutes, when the ten minutes were over, what would be my opinion as to what was closest to your heart? When the ten minutes were over and you went away, I wonder what you would say is closest to the heart of Brother Tom? Jesus left no doubt about what was closest to His heart.

I’m going to speak to you this morning from five different Scriptures I’m reading one of them at this time, and we might call it our text.

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:36-53).

For our text notice verse 47: **“That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”**

Five times in the first five books of the New Testament we have recorded by four different writers what is called the GREAT COMMISSION.

Jesus Christ has given a commission to the church. If you want to know what is closest to the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, notice the five times that the Great Commission is given in the first five book of the New Testament. Of course, you know the answer. The thing closest to the heart of Jesus Christ was the matter of soul-winning—seeing people saved, seeing people hear about Jesus, Who could satisfy the longing of the heart, forgive sin, and save people from sin. Every time you find Jesus in the Bible He is interested in somebody’s soul. He was the greatest personal worker the world has ever known. The greatest sermons and discourses He ever gave were not given to great multitudes of people, but, in many instances, they were given to one person.

You see Him sitting at Jacob’s Well in John 4. He is thirsty and tired, but there is a longing in His heart that supersedes His desire for water and His desire for rest. A woman comes who is lost. Jesus talks with her and leads her to a saving knowledge of Himself. The disciple come later with food to eat. He says, **“I have meat to eat that ye know not of”** (John 4:32).

You see Him one night in the city of Jerusalem, and perhaps He and His anxious inquirer were standing out in the beautiful Judean moonlight. From His blessed lips that night there came the most vital and important message that ever fell on human ears, the message of the new birth.

That message was not given in the temple to a great congregation of people, it was not spoken to thronging multitudes on the hillsides. It was spoken to one man—a lost, rich, religious ruler.

Jesus was not too busy to talk alone with one man or woman. The preacher who is too busy to speak with one lost man or woman will probably never build a large church or speak to great congregations.

I think I am safe in saying that the thing that was closest to the heart of Jesus Christ was to see people saved. The thing that was on His heart all the time, the thing for which He came into the world He expressed in Luke 19:10 in these words, **“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.”**

In Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts Jesus gives the commission to the church.

Every church, every church member, every Christian and every preacher ought to be interested in knowing what the commission to the church is. What did the Lord Jesus Christ, before He left this world, tell the church that the church’s job is? What is our greatest responsibility? What is the thing that five times Jesus talked about just before the heavens burst with the glory of God and He was received out of sight? What is the thing that five times Jesus mentioned and indicated that it meant more to Him than anything else taught in the Word of God?

I. THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE (MATTHEW 28:20)

In the closing verses of the Gospel of Matthew for the first time in the New Testament, we find the commission of the Lord Jesus Christ to the church. There we read, **“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world”** (Matthew 28:18-20).

The amazing and wonderful thing about the five times Jesus commissions the church to win souls is that He makes a separate and distinct promise to the church or to the Christian who will win lost souls. He says, ***“If you carry out My commission, you can depend on My presence.”***

Every one of these five times He guarantees the Christian something. Every one of these five times He assures the Christian of something different if the Christian would be a soul winner. Here He says, ***“If you go into all the world, if you make the gospel known if you put soul-winning first in your church, in your heart, in your life, in your time, if you put soulwinning at the top of the list, “LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAY, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE AGE.”***

There is a sense in which He is with every Christian. There is a sense in which God is with a Christian if he never lifts his hand to win a soul. There is a sense in which God is with me if I never speak to another lost soul from now until my dying day. He came into my heart years ago. He will never leave me nor forsake me. God Almighty is with me all the time, anywhere and everywhere.

But here’s something special: Jesus said, ***“If you go into all the world . . .”*** Your world starts right where you are. It starts in your family. It starts on your street. It starts in your office. It starts wherever you touch one single human life.

Jesus said, ***“If you go to people with the gospel, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age.”***

I think of some of the wonderful moments of my fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and I’ve enjoyed some wonderful moments, thank God. I think about times when I go yonder into my office, close the door and get down on my knees with God’s Book open before my face and ask God to speak to me and then tell God what I have on my heart. Those are wonderful moments.

Every night before bedtime, I take the Word of God and gather my family about me and read a chapter of God’s Holy Word and we bow our heads and thank God for His goodness upon our home and upon our family. Those are wonderful moments. God is with us when we pray as a family.

But the one time in all the Word of God that the Lord Jesus Christ promised His presence in a special way to a Christian is when that Christian is in the act of soul-winning. ***“If you go,”*** He said, ***“lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age.”***

It is a mystery to me why it is so hard to get people to do what Jesus taught they are supposed to do; that is, to witness to the lost. Never am I more conscious of His presence than when I am out to win a soul to Him. I am thinking of a Sunday afternoon some time ago when my daughter and I went out on a Sunday afternoon to go from house to house to find the lost and unchurched. I could preach a whole sermon on miraculous things which have happened on one street while doing such work. On this particular occasion as I knocked at the door of one home, a middle-aged lady came to the door. She was in tears, and it was evident that she was in great distress. I said to her, "I am Tom Malone, and my daughter and I are out inviting people to come to the service tonight at the Emmanuel Baptist Church."

"Oh Brother Tom," she said, "I have heard you many times on the radio. I am so glad you came. I am in deep distress; please come in quickly." She continued, "My son is back here in the kitchen; he is a war veteran. While he was in the service, his wife proved unfaithful to him and has now left him. He has a knife in his hand and is about to take his life. Won't you please help him?"

I went back into the kitchen and standing over by the sink was a fine looking young man, shaking like a leaf in the wind and weeping like a child. I took him by the hand and led him to chair and told him of One Who could forgive him of all his sin and Who would be a friend and companion and would never prove unfaithful to him. I had the joy of leading both mother and son to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. God knew where that boy was and knew he was close to an eternal hell. He led me there; He gave me words to say. He was with me. **"And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."**

You may never have the backing and approval of great religious machines and denominational programs, but you can reckon upon the presence of God if you really want to be a soul winner.

II. THE PROMISE OF HIS PROTECTION (MARK 16:15-18)

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be dammed. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:15-18).

Here in the Book of Mark where Jesus gives the Great Commission, He gives it with the promise of His protection. Notice the five things that Jesus promises that His disciples were to have victory over:

1. They could cast out devils.
2. They could speak with new tongues, or new languages.
3. They could take up serpents.
4. If they drank any deadly thing, it would not hurt them.
5. They were to have victory over disease.

I have often given thought and prayer to this passage of Scripture in Mark 16 because, beyond any shadow of doubt, there are some difficulties attached to it. We make no claim to scholarship; we are merely a student of the Scriptures, but there are two or three things we believe to be true concerning this passage which ought to be mentioned here.

First, from verse 9 in this chapter to the end, through verse there is a question about the inspiration of it. Scofield footnotes make plain that these verses are not found in the two oldest and most authoritative manuscripts, the Sinaitic and Vaticanus. Nevertheless, it was quoted as we have it by the early church saints and soon after Pentecost, and in all probability it is a part of the sacred writings, inspired of God.

A second matter that should be mentioned is that this particular Scripture might be said to be apostolic in nature. The signs Jesus gave here, which were to follow preaching the gospel and winning the lost, were definitely apostolic. The apostles had these signs in their ministry. For instance, Paul, on the island of Malta, was bitten by a venomous serpent, which did him no harm because God was with him to protect him. His work was not done, and until his work of soul-winning was finished, God would allow no harm to come to him.

The third thing, and to me the most wonderful, is that beyond any shadow of doubt the passage is designed to teach that God's special protection is promised to the soul winner and the angels of the Lord encamp around about those who seek to do His will and send His Word to the ends of the earth. I have the assurance in my heart that no evil could possibly befall me as I seek to win the lost except it come from the hand of God as a part of His directive will for my life and ministry.

I know that many of God's chosen saints have laid down their lives for the gospel's sake, have been torn asunder, thrown to the wild beasts and burned at the stake, but I believe that by the cruel persecution and death of these saints of God they have won more people and sent the gospel further into the regions of the world than they ever could have by living.

I have sometimes felt it was almost unnecessary to speak concerning the protective power of God for soul winners.

So few of God's people today are out in the hot part of the battle; so few are willing to endanger themselves and hazard their life for the cause of Christ. So many today play it absolutely safe, take no risk whatever and keep a safe distance away from the possibility of embarrassment and persecution. The same God who sent earthquakes to tear down prisons and sent angels to jail to liberate His messenger will protect the child of God who dares to walk with Him in this all important matter of soul-winning.

God protects his soul winners. Thank God for this. If you will consecrate your services this day to the Lord, put soul-winning first in your life, now and forever, God's hand will be on your life in a most wonderful and in a special way. I have been in places as a preacher from which I do not believe I could have come out unscathed and unharmed had it not been for His assisting grace and His overcoming power.

III. THE PROMISE OF HIS PROGRAM (LUKE 24:46-47)

In the Book of Luke, Jesus outlines His program in the Great Commission. He says, “**Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations** (Now watch; I want to dwell on this!) **beginning at Jerusalem**” (Luke 24:46-47).

Jesus said, “***The gospel must go to the ends of the earth.***” Where is this church to start? Where were the twelve disciples to begin? Where is this Pentecostal church, which is filled with the Holy Spirit of God, to start? Where are you to start? Jesus said, “***It’s going to all nations but beginning at Jerusalem.***”

Why? It was at Jerusalem that wicked people crucified the Son of God, and they were as lost as the heathen in the darkest part of the world. Jesus is teaching here that before you can send the gospel to Africa and India, you must evangelize at home. That is the program for the church and for any New Testament Christian church. Start at home. The biggest farce in the world is to send a dollar to Africa and not knock on a door in Pontiac or some other city. It’s hypocrisy and it’s mockery!

Word came to me some time ago of a missionary circle in which some members (not all of them, thank God) said “Visitation business is not our business. We’re a missionary circle.”

Yes, it is your business. The missionary program for the church I pastor starts in the city of Pontiac. If we can’t have a missionary circle that believes that, we won’t have one.

First at Jerusalem!

Do you know why some people don’t win souls at home? They’ve never seen the truth that Jesus taught, the truth to start at Jerusalem. Do you know what it means? It means to start at yourself. Be sure you know Christ as your personal Saviour. Start winning souls at Jerusalem.

The program of the fundamental church of this age is to make Christ known by radio, by preaching, by paper, by house to house visitation, by word of mouth—every way we possibly can. That was the program of the early church. That was the program of the church at Pentecost. That was the program of the church filled with the Holy Ghost. That was the program of the early church. “**Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ**” (Acts 5:42).

Let me tell you, there is many a church member and many a man or woman who criticizes the soul-winning program, criticizes the preacher that preaches it, when the only thing that person needs is an old-fashioned dose of salvation, repentance of sin and getting right with God.

The program of Jesus is soul-winning, and if we don’t put that first, we can’t do anything right for God.

The biggest mockery in the world is to have a Christian School or a church that doesn't win souls! The biggest mockery on earth is to have a seminary in a church, as we have, if we are not winning people to Christ. A missionary circle which does not win souls at home is a religious farce!

I expect every board member of our church to have a part in soul winning, and I wouldn't give five cents for any member of any board that wouldn't help win souls to Jesus Christ. They're not worthy of the name. They ought to get off the board. They're not interested in the souls of men and women.

I wouldn't give you a nickel for a Sunday school teacher who had no interest in knocking on doors and telling people about Jesus and trying to get people saved. I wouldn't give you a nickel for a choir member that sings, "O, How I Love Jesus," and fights a program that Jesus instituted.

It's hypocritical, a farce, wicked, and a positive indication of backsliding in the heart of anybody that's not interested in it. If I weren't interested in it, I just wouldn't tell anybody for anything in the world, because it surely makes it look mighty bad for you. It's closest to the heart of Jesus.

Isn't it strange that what was closest to the heart of Jesus is furthest from the heart of the average Christian? Do you understand it?

Do you understand how it could be that the thing closest to Jesus' heart is so often furthest from the hearts of so-called professing people of God? I wonder sometimes if the reason for it is that the person has not started at Jerusalem? That is starting at home, starting with getting saved yourself. I believe every really saved person is interested in putting forth some effort to see people saved.

I heard some years ago of a young woman who had graduated from a Christian school and applied as a missionary candidate to a board then working in China. She was from a California city where there was a rather large population of Chinese people. A member of the examining board said, "Have you ever won a Chinese to Christ?"

"Oh no," she said, "I haven't been to China yet. I'll win them after I get there."

The member of the missionary board said, "If you don't love the Chinese enough here in America to win them to Jesus, you will have no success at winning them after you get to China. I am going to vote against accepting you. I don't believe you will ever make a good missionary."

I agree with him. If you don't love the souls of men enough to win them right here and right now, you never will win them. "**Beginning at Jerusalem**"—there is only one starting place and that is right where you are now.

IV. THE PROMISE OF His PEACE (JOHN 20:19-23)

The fourth time the Great Commission is given is in John. Here Jesus guaranteed something else to the soul winner.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so I send you” (John 20:19-21).

Jesus said, ***“As you go discharging that commission, giving that gospel, you are going to have great peace in your life.”***

We talk about twisted personalities. The only thing wrong with some people’s personalities is that they are not doing the will of God. The greatest adjustment in human life is to be in God’s will and to be doing what God wants you to. That will adjust more personalities than anything else in the world. That will do more for human life than anything else on this earth. The greatest peace that ever came into the heart of a human being is the peace of knowing he has done his best as a Christian to see people saved.

Some of my church people sent me a message a few days ago to go see a man in the hospital. I went to see that man three times. The first time I went to see him, I could get nowhere. But I knew the man was lost and sick; so I went back the second time and stood by his bed. He did not want to hear what I had to say, but God Almighty had given me the responsibility to witness to the lost. I stood at that bedside and read John 3:16 and Acts 16:31 and other verses showing how to be saved. I said, “O God, when I turn from this bed in a moment and walk out of this hospital, I want to be able to say that that man on his dying bed heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Father, when some day I stand up yonder before Your throne, I don’t want the blood of that man’s soul to be on my hands.”

He did not get saved. Later I got a message, “He’s worse now.” I went back the third time. I said, “Friend, can you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Can you understand what I am saying?” “Yes.”

I went over it again. I bowed my head and prayed. I believe his eyes were wide open during the prayer. I don’t think he ever showed any interest.

The following day the message came that he was dead. His destiny was forever sealed. There was no more chance. Never would he hear the gospel again.

When the message came, I said to my wife, “Thank God I did my best.”

Listen, friend, death and disaster strike everywhere. It’s happening to your neighbors, your friends, your loved ones. Members of this audience today have people who are on their way to hell and who are near to you.

How will it be when the doctor says, “Your daddy is dying,” or, “Your sister is dead.” Can you lift your voice toward heaven and say, “God, I did my best; I put You first in my life, my heart, my home, my business, and I tried to make Jesus known to some lost soul.”

There is a great peace in my heart today because I did my best to win him. His blood will not be on my hands in the day of reckoning. **“Peace be unto you, as my father hath sent me even so send I you.”**

V. THE PROMISE OF HIS POWER (ACTS 1:8)

The Great Commission is given the fifth time in Acts 1:8, **“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”**

You say, “Brother Tom, I want to but I can’t. I’m not strong enough.”

Listen, friend, neither am I. There’s not a man or woman in this building any weaker than I am. But let me tell you, Jesus guarantees His power. He said that you have the power of the Holy Spirit to win souls to Jesus Christ. I’m here to say today that every man, every woman, every Christian who wants to see people saved and wants to evangelize this city and send the gospel to the ends of the earth can have that power of God to do it if he wants it. But it will cost something to have that power.

- You cannot have the world and have that power also.
- You cannot love and harbor sin in your heart and have that power also.
- You cannot be filled with your own plans, your own ambitions, and your own desires and be filled with that power.

God fills clean vessels and empty vessels.

How about it, friend? Are you saved? Are you interested in making the gospel known? That is what is closest to the heart of Jesus. That is what I have on my heart. That is the commission to the church. That is marching orders. The Captain of the church says, “These are my orders.”

God give us men and women who will salute and say, “Ask for me, dear Jesus. I’m ready, and I’ll take Your gospel wherever You want it to go, and I’ll be a humble, faithful witness for You.” We have the promise of His presence, His protection, His program, His peace, and His power. What more do we need?

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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