

SPIRITUAL GROWTH part 3: EVANGELISM

On Christmas Eve, my son and his wife and my daughter and her family were at our house. We ate dinner together and then, as our tradition is we opened presents. One of the highlights of the night was a present that we gave to my 5-year-old grandson Gabriel. Gabriel had his heart set on a certain space ship. The problem was that those particular space ships were in high demand and costly. My wife had explained to Gabriel a few weeks before Christmas that he may not get one of those spaceships, and he cried. To make a long story short, after having looked at numbers of stores, Beth decided that she would look one more place. As she walked down the aisle of that store, she saw one of those space ship in a box all by itself. It was not in the place where they sold those spaceships. It was on another aisle. Beth asked someone who worked there if he would mind getting the spaceship down with the explanation that she knew that we would not be able to afford it, but she wanted to check anyway. To her surprise, for some unknown reason that perfectly new spaceship was about \$50.00 less than could be found anywhere else. After having opened a number of presents, the spaceship was brought out all wrapped up in a big box, and Beth asked Gabriel to help her open that big box. She had placed a lot of extra paper on top of the space ship so that it was not recognized at first. But after having pulled out a lot of paper, little Gabriel began to notice some familiar markings. He became more and more excited and said, “what is this!” When he saw what it was, he went ballistic. To say that he was pleased is the understatement of the year.

Why did God make us with the capability of emotion? Why did He make it so that we can be so sad or so elated? The answer is that he made us in his image. We must never forget that God is a spiritual person who has emotion as well as intellect and will. That being the case, our lives can either please him or displease him. We can make him happy, or we can make him sad. Our current sermon series is on pleasing God. If we’re to make progress in pleasing God, we must have a clear idea of what pleasing him means.

We have seen that it pleases God when we grow spiritually. Last week we saw that it pleases God when we increase in faith. Today, we’re going to look at a third way that we can please God. God is pleased when we bring other people into a relationship with him. Bringing people into a relationship with God is called “evangelism.” Why do people have to be brought to God? If God made everyone, why are they not already in a relationship with the one who made them?

HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE

1. The creation of man

Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The Hebrew word for created is “bara,” and it has the idea of instantaneous creation out of nothing. The housewife may create a beautiful cake. The artist may create a beautiful painting, and the builder may create a new home, but they all do what they do from a source of pre-existing materials. When God created the world, He did so out of nothing.

Then, using the dirt He had made,

Genesis 2:7-8 says, “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.”

The word "formed" (vs 7) is used of a potter shaping clay. God took the dust of the earth into His hands and fashioned the man that was already in His heart. Man was fully equipped with lungs, bones, organs and everything else he needed, except life. So God breathed life into His creation. From that point, man and God fellowshiped together in a wonderful relationship. All was well planet earth.

2. The fall of man

How did our world, which was created in perfection, ever get to where it is today? What went wrong? What went wrong is the point of Genesis 3 because it presents the story of the fall of man. This story is the biblical explanation for all of the problems we see in our world today. Every negative, harmful thing from sickness to murder originated in this chapter.

Sin did not begin in the Garden of Eden; it began in heaven. A great number of angels had been created. Evidently the greatest of these beings was an angel called “Lucifer.” Ezekiel 28:12 says that before his fall this angel was “full of wisdom.” We find him introduced in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

”The word “crafty” in vs 1 means “wise.” Next to God, Lucifer was the most brilliant being in the universe, but he rebelled against his Creator and became Satan. .

Genesis 3:2-4, “The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman.”

Satan told Adam and Eve what he has been telling people ever since. He told them that they can sin and get away with it. What's the big deal about eating from this one tree? You eat from all the other trees all the time, and nothing happens. It won't hurt if you eat from this tree. Unfortunately, the first man and woman listened to the serpent and ate of the forbidden tree. What happened then was catastrophic. Those 2 perfect people lost their perfection and became sinners. Our culture takes sin lightly, but God does not. The Bible uses the disease of leprosy as a picture of sin.

Chuck Swindol said, "During my hitch in the Marines back in 1958, I was stationed on Okinawa where there was a leprosarium. At that time, I was playing in the third division band in the Marine Corps, and we were to do a performance on that north part of the island of Okinawa. I had read about leprosy, but I had never seen a leper, and I wasn't really prepared for what I saw. I saw stumps instead of hands. I saw clumps instead of fingers. I saw half faces. I saw one ear instead of two. I saw the dregs of humanity unable to even applaud our performances. I saw the faces of men, women and even some teenagers in anguish crying out. We could play music for them, but we could not cleanse them from their disease.

What leprosy does to the outside of a person, sin does to the inside. It corrupts the soul and removes the joy that God wants to be in a person's life. The truth about sin is no one gets away with it, and the consequences of sin will always be greater than the pleasure of the sin.

3. *The Fall of Mankind*

If Adam had lived to be 5,000 years old, he could have never imagined how big and far reaching the consequences of his sin would be. His sin affected not only his own life but also the lives of the entire human race. Once Adam became a sinner, he could do nothing more than to pass on that sin nature with those who were his descendants.

It would be like someone going into the hospital and getting a blood transfusion with blood that had been corrupted with the HIV virus.

Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."

Every child born after Adam was born with a sin nature. If you don't believe that, just watch children. Who teaches them to do wrong? They don't have to be taught to do wrong because wrong is inborn within them. And what about yourself? What is it that makes us repeatedly do things that can only hurt us? It is the fact that we have a sin nature living within us.

4. The future of mankind

The bible teaches that God is a just and holy God who must punish sin. Romans 6: 23 says, “the wages of sin is death.” Death does not mean you stop existing. Death means separation. When we die, our souls are separated from our bodies, and if our sins are not forgiven, we’re separated from God throughout eternity in a place called “hell.” God is perfect, and He cannot and will not tolerate sin in his presence. There’s coming a day when he will remove it from his creation.

Acts 17:31 For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.

All of that is bad news, and it is not a whole lot of fun to think about. The truth is that there is good news about the bad news. The gospel means “good news.” The good news is that although mankind fell away from God and lost God’s blessings, there is a way out. The good news is that Jesus Christ died in our place as a substitute for our sin and that we can be forgiven through him. History records that during the Civil War, both the armies of the north and the south committed many acts of violence. For example, in October of 1862, the town of Palmyra, Missouri was under military law....occupied by one of the armies involved in this conflict. Someone in the town became an informer and leaked information to the enemy. In response, the commander of the army ordered ten men shot. Several men were being detained in Palmyra jail as prisoners of war at that time, and ten were selected from among them. One of them was William T. Humphrey, the father of several children. His wife pleaded for his release because of the children and her poor physical condition. Because of this, the commanding officer struck Humphrey's name from the list and chose the name of Hiram Smith, a young man without a family. Hiram agreed to take the place of Humphrey, stating that perhaps it was better for a single man to die than a man with a family. At the Mount Pleasant Church cemetery, there is a stone erected at the grave of Hiram Smith by G. W. Humphrey, the son of the man who was spared. It reads: "This monument is dedicated to the memory of HIRAM SMITH, the hero who sleeps beneath the sod here, who was shot at Palmyra, October 17, 1862 as a substitute for William T. Humphrey, my father."

One man died for another, and that is exactly what Jesus did for us.

Romans 5:6-8, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus Christ became my substitute so that our sins could be forgiven. But it gets even better. The bible teaches that those who place their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior not only reserve a place for themselves in heaven but also have a little bit of heaven while on earth. That’s because God changes the people that he brings to his kingdom.

Today, we are going to celebrate with people who have put their faith in Jesus and who have begun living that changed life. We are going to hear some testimonies from a few of those people.

ACTION POINTS

1. IF YOU HAVE PERSONALLY RECEIVED CHRIST-GIVE GOD THANKS

Everyone of us will one day leave this world, and each passing day brings us closer to that time. But death is not the end. It is the beginning of a life lived forever with a joy and with blessing that we can't even imagine now. Paul said in

1 Corinthians 15 :54-55, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" We need to thank God for His indescribable gift."

2. GIVE GOD THANKS FOR THE MIRACLE OF REBIRTH THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LIVES OF THESE PEOPLE

Colossians 1:3-6, "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints...."

Many people would like to see God work a miracle. What you see in the lives of those who have been brought into the family of God is a miracle. The kingdom of Satan has been penetrated and captives have been set free!

3. REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW CHRIST

What would we think about someone who had the cure for leprosy but never shared that cure with those who needed it? That person would have to be very calloused. It is easy for us to get that way. Some years ago, a 28-year old woman named Kitty Genovese was followed by a man in Queens, New York and stabbed to death. The victim was attacked 3 different times before she died. Twice the villain left the scene, once driving off in his car, but no one raised a finger to help or even notify the police. Miss Genovese did not die until she was stabbed the third time, nearly a half hour after the first attack.

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Investigating officials reported that at least 38 people saw her being attacked or heard her screams, but no one called the police. One witness was quoted as saying, “I didn’t want to get involved.” Another said, “I was tired. I went back to bed.”

VIDEO CLIP

All around us there are people being attacked by sin, and God wants us to tell them the good news that can set them free. That pleases God.

4. IF YOU DON'T KNOW JESUS CHRIST, PRAY TODAY FOR HIS GIFT OF FORGIVENESS