

iShare and Evangelism: Lifestyle Evangelism

Matthew 4:18-20

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June 3, 2012 – Morning Sermon

Matthew 4:18-20 says [18] While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he (Jesus) saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." [20] Immediately they left their nets and followed him. This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God for His Word.

Charles Trumbull wrote a book years ago titled Taking Men Alive and in it he says that as a young man he made this his life resolution that whenever he was in such a relation to another person and had the privilege of directing the conversation then he would direct it to their relationship to Christ. Then he would seek to lead them to Christ or to another step toward Christ. That is quite a life resolution if you think about it. Now he would do this when he was able to choose the topic of conversation but if he didn't have that choice he wouldn't but this puts an immense responsibility on you to seek to reach out and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

Notice here the responsibility of every Christian to witness for Christ. Matthew 4:18-19 says [18] While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he (Jesus) saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. [19] And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." As a Puritan writer, Thomas Boston wrote a book titled The Art of Man-Fishing and when Jesus says "Follow Me" He is the chief fisher of men and He can instruct us how to catch men. In Acts 1:8 Jesus says [8] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Obviously, that applied not just to the people He was talking to but to all of us who would come after them for this is to go to the utter most parts of the earth.

What did the early church do with that commission and challenge? In Acts 8 you have the description of what they did and this text is about the stoning of Stephen. Acts 8:1, 4 says [1] And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they

were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. [4] Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

There is a book titled *Evangelism in the Early Church* by Michael Green who is a British Theologian and he says "Notice there that it's not the apostles out preaching the Word but it's the laymen. They went everywhere preaching the Gospel and the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. This must not have been a formal preaching but the informal chattering with friends and chance acquaintances in homes, wine shops and around market stalls. They went everywhere gossiping the Gospel." I like that – gossiping the Gospel. He says "They did it naturally, enthusiastically and with a conviction of those who are not paid to say such things. Consequently they were taken seriously and the movement spread notably among the lower classes. If there was no distinction in the early church between full time ministers and laymen in the responsibility to spread the Gospel by every means possible, there was equally no distinctions between the sexes in the matter. It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness for Christ, not only by life but by lip."

There is a responsibility of every Christian to witness. You may say "Amen, preach it brother, but it just doesn't apply to me because I don't have the gift of evangelism." There is such a thing as the gift of evangelism and it is estimated that about ten percent of Christians have that gift but all of us have the responsibility of sharing our faith and all of us have the privilege of doing that.

I want you to think about the possibility of you being an effective witness for Jesus Christ. Notice the promise of success. Jesus said "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men." He can make us fishers of men and in a sense only He can make us fishers of men. Also there is the promise of power in Acts 1:8 which says [8] "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Jesus was speaking about what was going to happen at Pentecost after Christ would ascend and the Spirit would come a few days later. They were anointed with this greater indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They had the Holy Spirit but now they are going to have this greater indwelling that would equip them to do this.

That greater indwelling you and I have and it's called the baptism of the Spirit. It is not that baptism effects it for baptism is a symbol of the cleansing and so on when we become Christians but when you become a Christian today you start off with that greater indwelling of the Spirit. That equips us in a lot of amazing ways. We are told in I Corinthians 12:13 that by one Spirit were you all baptized into Christ and have all been made to drink of that one Spirit. If I could take some of my human spirit and place it in each of you, by virtue of my human spirit being in you in union with your human spirit, you would be an extension of my body. By one Spirit were you all baptized into one body and made to drink of that Spirit.

That's what happened when you became a Christian, so you start off with that greater indwelling. Now we need to walk in the Spirit and filled with the Spirit but we have that greater indwelling that Jesus sent. So we have that promised power. You shall receive power after the Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses (Acts 1:8). So you have His promise – follow Me and I'll make you fishers of men and you have His promise of power.

I think of Dawson Trotman. He was a great personal witness. He was a leader in the Navigators. Dawson said "I've been a Christian for 29 years and it still frightens me to talk to a man about his need of Christ. It occurred to me one day that, that fear was like a little red light going off and on reminding me of something. Not by my might, nor by my power but by My Spirit says the Lord." In other words, you and I need to realize that we can't lead anyone to Christ, unless He enables us to do it. This will make us rely on Him if we realize that.

What are you doing when you go out and share the Gospel? You are seeking to raise the dead. Until a person becomes a Christian, he is alive physically but he is spiritually dead. When Jesus said "Lazarus come forth" Lazarus was physically raised from the dead and came out of that tomb. Jesus said "The works that I do shall you do also and greater works shall you do because I will go to the Father (John 14:12) and pray He will give you the Spirit of Truth which the world cannot receive because they do not know Him but you know Him for He has been with you and you will have Him in this fuller way. I will come and do these works through you." Jesus said "greater works" and what could be greater than raising Lazarus from the dead? Raising someone who is spiritually dead is a greater miracle and we can be instruments in that. What a privilege! As we rely on Him and not our own abilities we can go out and tackle this.

Teaching us to be fishers of men is the promise of the Spirit but there is the parallel responsibility to study and learn how to do this and then to step out and tackle it. So we see the responsibility of every Christian to witness, now think of the potentiality of when we do witness. They have been fishing for fish and now they are going to fish for men. That is a move up. Suppose I was a brain surgeon and you brought your child to me who has a brain tumor and by your ability and skills you operate and you're successful in bestowing physical life. What a privilege but how much more a privilege if we can be instrumental in bestowing spiritual life. We can't do it ourselves but we can be His instruments in doing it. It's the potentiality when we witness.

There is also the potentiality in terms of multiplication. We read where Andrew discovered Christ as the Messiah and goes and finds Peter and says "I have found the Christ, the Messiah!" He introduces Peter to Christ. When the Spirit came a little later Peter preaches at Pentecost and 3,000 are converted. Boy, the potentiality when we share our faith!

We had a lady years ago here who came to Christ and then she took some training in sharing her faith. Other ladies had a luncheon who brought friends who weren't Christians to the luncheon and she shared how she came to Christ, her testimony. A lady there was impressed with what was said but didn't respond to becoming a Christian and a couple of weeks later they bumped into each other at the grocery store. This lady said "I was present when you spoke at the luncheon" and they got to talking. They went and sat in the car and the lady led her to Christ. She went home so excited and when her husband came home she ran down the steps and jumped in his arms. She said to him "The greatest thing happened today!" He said "Really? Did someone die and leave us some money?" She said "No, I became a Christian today and I know I'm going to heaven!" He said "You've always been a Christian and you can't know you're going to heaven." She said "Yes you can."

She found out I was leading a home Bible study in their area and called me and said "I'm going to bring my husband to that Bible study so don't let anyone say anything to him because he is so skittish." I said, "Okay" and he came for about six weeks and then came to see me. He said "I have prided myself on being the youngest deacon in my church and I was shooting to be the youngest elder but since I've seen a change in my wife and coming to that Bible study I realize I have never really been a Christian." He accepted Christ and it wasn't long before he came to me and said "I believe God wants me in full time ministry." He wound up going on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ, gave him some training and put him down at LSU." He did a terrific job heading up Campus Crusade's work there and then he came to Briarwood and headed up the beginning of our ministry to the medical community at UAB for about ten years. Then we needed someone to do this full time so he came in and started up our CMMA (Christian Medical Ministry of Alabama) which has had a tremendous ministry. We just celebrated the 30th anniversary of that. That was Earl and Judy Carpenter.

The potential when we do this is incredible. A lady took some training and went to a luncheon and look what came out of that! We had another lady who took some training to share her faith and shared with an African American high school student at the fair. He came and gave me his name and we followed up with him. He worked with us in our summer camping program, he went to college and then after graduation came on staff with us to head up our outreach to the inner city. Later he left us and went to head up Cornerstone City School and now he goes around with ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International) starting inner city Christian schools all over the United States. That was Bernard Gant. No telling what God will do when we share our faith.

What methods do we use? As we look at the methodology in the New Testament there are varied methods. There was open air evangelism like Paul at Athens and going to the synagogue. There was groups that met in homes like Jason's group in Thessalonica and Justis' home in Corinth. Home Bible studies are a

great way to reach out to others and help them feel comfortable when they come when sharing your faith.

A couple of years ago a couple came to church here and the lady accepted Christ and she wanted to start a Bible study in her home. At the time I was leading a Bible study down at the medical center. One of the men at the church said he would get a room at the medical center for me to teach there Tuesdays at noon. So I had been doing that for a number of years. Different people came to that study from medical students to nurses to maintenance people and other people at UAB. There was a young man getting his degree in the ministry who had come in. He accepted Christ with me and he was a good student. When I had to miss I would ask him to lead the group for me and he would do it.

Then I needed someone to lead this Bible study for this lady who had come to Christ here at church in her home so I asked him to lead this Bible study. He said "I can't do that." I said "Yes you can because you've been leading this study down here for me. I'll give you the material." He said "Would you go with me?" I said "I'll go with you the first time." As we were driving over there I said "The fellow whose home this is in is kind of hostile." He said "What?!" I said "Yes, his wife is a new Christian and she has invited all her friends, relatives and neighbors and he's not a Christian. He's not happy at all." He said "You need to lead this." I said "Alright I'll lead it tonight but after tonight you're on your own." He was kind of hostile but somehow we got through it. The young man kept going back to lead the Bible study and after about six months that hostile fellow got on his knees and accepted Christ. He then became an elder in our church, then our church administrator and then he became moderator of the General Assembly of the PCA. That was Tom Leopard.

That young chemistry student graduated with his PhD and went up to North Alabama teaching in a college up there. A year later he had me come with 30 students in his home. He had them quote the book of Philippians verbatim to me. Then he went to seminary and planted a church in Albany, Georgia. Then he went and disciplined men behind the Iron Curtain, particularly pastors there. When the Curtain came down I went over and visited with him and met those men. Now he is doing that in Burma and in Asia in various places, where it's against the rules and all. That was Wayne Curls. Here we see the use of homes and webs of relationships which are a real key to this.

We have a diagram on witnessing. First there is my personal walk, the inner circle with the Lord. Then I need to look at what other immediate family members of mine are not Christians. When I became a Christian in seminary my first thought was why didn't someone ever tell me this before that salvation is a gift. I thought "Did my folks understand it?" I went home to ask them "Do you understand that salvation is a gift and you don't earn it or deserve it?" They said "Yes." I said "Why didn't you tell me?" They said "We did." "Okay" and then I thought "Does my sister know that?" I went over to tell her "Do you understand

salvation is a gift?" She said "No" and I led her to the Lord and her family to the Lord. They all accepted Christ.

Then I thought I needed to try and reach those guys I grew up with. So I called up one of them and said "Hey I'm in town, let's get together." When I went over another dropped by and then another and I thought I'll just get three at one time. One said "Hey we have enough for poker." I said "I don't want to play poker, I want to tell you what Christ has done in my life." They said "We don't want to hear it, deal the cards." When I wound up coming back into Birmingham I didn't go after them but I'll come back to that story in a minute. We want to reach out. We go from immediate family to other relatives and what can I do to reach out and strengthen the relationship. What about close friends, then business acquaintances or business associates and so on? Think that through and then begin to work on the relationships to reach out and invite them to things.

We find that when Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, has come into contact with Judaism he finds some real things and he is praying to God and God sends an angel to him. He sends someone to Simon Tanner and asks for Simon Peter to come. Peter comes to Cornelius' home where he has all his friends and relatives in the home and Peter shares the Gospel. The Spirit of God comes on them like it had at Pentecost and here is where the Gospel breaks out to the Gentiles. We see the webs of relationships where Cornelius has invited all his friends and everyone. We read in Luke 5 where Matthew is a tax collector has come to faith in Christ and then he has a party with all these tax collectors and invites Jesus to the party. That is using webs of relationships here.

I think of a couple in our church who came to Christ and then invited some friends over. They invited my wife and I over and I shared the Gospel with this medical doctor and his wife and he said "What! God became a man and died! That's not Christianity because I would have heard about that." I said, "I didn't invent this. This is Christianity." I gave him the book Basic Christianity by John Stott and he was invited to a Bible study but he wasn't interested at all. A couple of months later he was taking a course in rapid reading and had read everything in the house but still needed a couple of hundred pages to read and he picked up Basic Christianity and read it rapidly. He called me and said "I read that book you gave me." I said "Good." He said "It said what you said." I said "Imagine that." He said "When does that Bible study meet?" I said "Thursday night." He said "Where does it meet?" I said "I'll pick you up." He said "Where does it meet?" I said "I'll pick you up." He went for about four weeks and then one night we meet at my home and I told him to stick around afterward to talk. He was ready to make a commitment and got on his knees and accepted the Lord.

He went home and told his wife. He told her "I became a Christian tonight. I accepted Jesus Christ." She said "That's good. You needed to do that. I did that sometime back." He said "You didn't do it with Frank." She said "You don't have to do it with Frank." He said "Yes you do." He brought her over to my house at

10pm at night and said "You get on your knees and you accept Christ with Frank" and she did. That was Doctor Bill Bailey and Bonnie Bailey. She started a women's discipleship program and he was a key leader in our CMMA ministry. This is just webs of relationships of inviting friends over.

I think of my father in law. When my wife and I got married he wasn't a Christian but he was an officer in his church. He thought of himself as a Christian but he really wasn't. I would try to talk to him about Christ and it would just deteriorate into an argument. Finally I just backed off and prayed for him for about a year. Then one Sunday we were going over their house for lunch and I said to my wife "I haven't tried to talk with your dad in about a year. Let's pray that I can do it without it degenerating into an argument." So we prayed and went into the house. He and I wound up in a room together while the ladies were fixing lunch.

I said "Dick I had an interesting conversation the other day with this fellow. I said to him suppose you died, stood outside the gate of heaven and God says 'why should I let you into My heaven?' What would you say? I would say I have lived a pretty good life and tried to keep the commandments doing a pretty good job and so I think you ought to let me in. So let's say we had three men who approached the gate and the first man gives that answer and God says to him that he hasn't really kept His commandments for all have sinned and come short. That's another way of saying you'll stand on your record, your self righteousness and no one has a good enough record. So he is not admitted. The second man approaches the gate and God says 'why should I accept you?' He said 'for two reasons. The first is I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and second I was pretty good so for those two reasons you should accept me. God says you contradict yourself. He said how is that? You said you believe in My Son as your Savior which is your trusting in Him to save you a sinner and that's what it means to believe in My Son and you saying you have been pretty good is getting back to your record which means you have one foot on My Son and one foot on your record. That's like one on rock and one on quick sand. You can't trust in your record for that is what you need saving from. So he is not admitted."

My father in law looked at me and said "That's right you can't get in on your record" which was exactly what he had been trusting in but now I wasn't talking to him about him but I was talking to him about this other fellow and he could listen without all his defenses going up. I said "The third fellow comes in and God asked him why He should accept him and he says 'well You really shouldn't as far as my record goes because I'm a sinner like everyone else but that is why You sent Your Son to die for my record and if I surrender my will to Him in true repentance and trust in Him alone as my Savior then You would forgive me.' God said 'you mean your only hope is My Son is all you have to offer?' He said 'yes sir' and God said 'that's it, come on in. That's faith in My Son.'" About that time they called us to lunch, he didn't say anything and I didn't say anything but I knew that the Light had gone on.

That afternoon my sister in law heard him go to his father in law and use that illustration with his father in law. Now he is concerned about his father in law. We saw his life really begin to change and about six months later we were over his house one day and talked about trying to reach out to someone spiritual. I said "Dick one of the best ways to do that is your own personal testimony but it's good to get your testimony in shape. Let me get a piece of paper and we'll get your testimony in shape. When did you first understand that salvation is a gift, you don't earn it or deserve it?" He said "You know when." I said "I don't know when." He said "It was when you told me that stupid story about those three men." Webs of relationships are a key factor and personal testimony is another one.

Every time you read about the Apostle Paul after his conversion he says "Did I ever tell you about the time I was going down the road to Damascus and this white light was there and this voice?" Here he is sharing his personal testimony. That is a great way to communicate the Gospel to people. I probably get to people more when I use my personal testimony as a lead in. You can use that to help you get to any particular tool you want to share. You can use the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John plus Basic Christianity and books like that. There are varied methods but there are some unvarying essentials.

The first unvarying essential is the ability to share my faith. The second would be prayer – praying for people to come to Christ. Years ago we had a young man who grew up in the church here and he got rebellious as a teenager. I was disgusted with him and I just wrote him off but my wife really cared for him. He was working his way through college at Samford University working at a clothing store in Mountain Brook. She would go into the clothing store and buy a handkerchief about once a month just to maintain the contact. He knew she cared about him so when he was having girlfriend problems he would call her for counsel. The only trouble was it would be 2am in the morning and he would be drunk. The phone would ring and I would pick it up and he would say "Mr. Barker (hiccup) this is Tommy (hiccup) let me speak to Mrs. Barker." I would give her the phone and she would talk to him for an hour at 2am in the morning in our double bed. I said "When are you going to quit wasting time with that no good bum?" She said "He is going to become a Christian." I said "No he's not." She said "I'm praying for him." I said "That one will not be answered." How is that for a spiritual attitude?

That went on for several years and then one night the phone rang and it was 2am. He said "Mr. Barker let me speak to Mrs. Barker." My wife got on the phone and he said "Mrs. Barker I've become a Christian and I don't want you to tell anyone because I want them to see it in my life first." Wow, that sounded good! He said "What can I do to reach my campus?" We worked on it and he was a genius at that. He graduated and came on staff with us to head up our outreach to Samford Campus. There was another fellow there who helped him with it and the two of them created Campus Outreach. That was Tom Carradine who had been so rebellious and all of that. He became an associate pastor and an

associate pastor at our sister church Oak Mountain. The key there was my wife prayed for him. That is so crucial that we pray for people like that.

Now we need to look at the availability of training where we are training you how to do that here. We have Evangelism Explosion training and other methods we use. We have the Bridge to Life training which is a great tool to use. You can say "I came across an interesting Scripture the other day of one verse that sums up the whole Bible. May I share it with you?" That leads into an easy presentation of the Gospel that's a very interesting one. I want to challenge you to take that training if you haven't already. Help train others if you have. Really get involved in reaching out to people and using your webs of relationships. It's so critical that we do this.

Think about the desirability of you doing this. Do it for Christ's sake. Christ said to Peter, "Simon Son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter said "Lord, You know I love You." Jesus said "Feed My sheep. If you love Me you'll go after those lost sheep." You bring them into the fold, you equip them and send them out. "Feed My sheep." Do it for

Christ's sake. Do it for your own sake. To me, the most satisfying thing in the world is to see someone come to Christ and see their life begin to change, their family impacted and the fruit that comes out of that. Seeing my father in law come to Christ was so fulfilling to me. Do it for your own sake.

Do it for the sake of others. When I came back to Birmingham after trying to reach my old buddies initially, I didn't try again when I came back to plant Briarwood. I thought they were too hard and I would go to greener grass. After being back a couple of years and being out of my office for lunch I came back and here sat one of my old buddies. Dr. Bill Buck who is a dentist in our church I led him to Christ. He said "Why didn't you tell me about Jesus?" I said "I tried to tell some of the guys but they wouldn't listen." He said "I might not have either but I deserve the chance." I said "That's true." He said "Let's go get the rest of them." We two oned them and a number of those fellows came to know Christ. Do it for the sake of others.

It could be that you're reading this today and you have never accepted Jesus Christ and trusted Christ alone to forgive you of your sins, and surrendered your will to Him. That's the starting place if you have never done that. There I was in seminary believing all about Christ but I didn't understand salvation was a gift where you trust in Him and surrender your will in true repentance. You are purposing to obey. If you have never done that then that's the place to start but if you have done that be reaching out to others, praying for them, get equipped and equip others. Let's pray.

Prayer:

As our hearts are bowed if you have never really surrendered your will and put your trust in Christ alone and you want to do that just pray in your heart right now “Lord Jesus, I purpose to obey You and I invite You to come and live in me and make any changes. I trust You as my Savior to forgive me as a gift.” Father, we pray also that You would really help us to reach out to others, to have a heart for and be equipped to do it. We ask it in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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