

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Gospel or Gimmickry?

by: Sewell Hall

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

These verses clearly indicate that there are times when gospel preaching is in season and out of season. History indicates the same. In the first century in most places it was in season; in the middle ages it was out of season. There was a thrilling season for the gospel in middle America in the early nineteenth century, while at the same time it was largely out of season in France and Europe.

In our own lifetime, we have seen the same situation change. This writer remembers days in Chattanooga when

non-Christians attended meetings in large numbers for no other reason than to hear the gospel, and ten or twenty baptisms were not uncommon in such a meeting. Simple gospel preaching does not now seem to have such drawing power.

What are we to do when gospel preaching is out of season; when people are more interested in education, entertainment, recreation, and social activities than they are in preaching; when the wisdom of the world has more appeal than the wisdom of God?

Common Answers

“You have to reach people where they are,” we are told. “We have to give them what they want to attract attention. Then we can reach them with the gospel.” On this basis, all kinds of gimmicks are used to entice the worldly. Many churches have turned into little more than community centers and social clubs. They are more involved with

ball teams and scout troops than with Bible teaching. The highways are crowded with their buses taking various age groups to every kind of amusement area in the country. Their advertising reads for all the world like a circus flyer, offering prizes, free gifts, and fun. Often, no promise is made of anything spiritual at all.

Others realizing that the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” limit their activities more to preaching. But even here, appeal is still to the worldly tastes of our generation. If possible, preachers are obtained who have made a big reputation in sports, in entertainment, or in government. Otherwise, great emphasis is given in advertising to the educational attainments of the speaker or to his gifts as a “dynamic, powerful, eloquent” speaker.

God's Way

The problem of disinterested people is not new. It existed in some places even in the first century. Paul said it existed in Corinth. “For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (I Corinthians 1:22-23).

Paul had the power to offer signs to the Jews and the knowledge to compete with the Greeks in worldly wisdom. The philosophy described above would have suggested advertisement of a lecture on “The Judaistic Philosophy in the Roman World.” Obtaining his audience with this, he could then slip in a little about Jesus and the cross. But this was not Paul’s approach, as he told us “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Human philosophy and human wisdom had no place in Paul’s plan for saving the lost in Corinth.

Preaching only the gospel, of course, Paul could have announced himself as “Dr. Paul, graduate of the University of Gamaliel, noted author, world traveler, inspired and dynamic lecturer.” Rather, he says, “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God ... I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:1, 3-5).

Worldly appeals simply cannot save lost men. And to attach them to the gospel is to cheapen the good news of Jesus Christ. By such appeals we may increase numbers and even “make waves,” but such individuals in the local church are liabilities

rather than assets. As materials in God's building they are classified as "wood, hay, and straw." Paul warns against building such material into the church: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work" (I Corinthians 3:10, 12, 13).

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2. "I'm not ready yet. Maybe tomorrow?" - Some people want to finish sowing their wild oats. Once they have had their fill of sin and its pleasures, then they plan to offer their ragged life to God, just before they expire. Such people underestimate God. He will not be tricked, or mocked (Galatians 6:7-8). You will reap what you sow. In reality, the race is not to become a Christian before you die, but to repent before your heart becomes hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, unable to hear the word and repent (Hebrews 3:13; Luke 8:4-15).

1. Me, myself, and I - Few, if any, would readily admit this is the reason for delaying their conversion. However, at some point, all of the nine above reasons cease to be barriers, and they become excuses, masking their own selfish, stubborn rebellion as the true reason (Romans 1:18-32). However, such people will one day find themselves surrounded by all the selfish beings that ever lived, angels and people (Matthew 25:41-46). How effectively will you be able to serve yourself and find happiness in that realm of eternal evil, darkness, and suffering, where nothing good dwells?

Conclusion

If you are delaying becoming a Christian, then please answer the question, "Why?" What stands in your way between you and the Lord? Why will you not do what you know to be right? How do you know this is not your last chance before you either die or your conscience becomes so hardened that it can no longer be pricked by the truth? If something still stands in your way, please talk to me, or any Christian, about it. There is nothing worth losing your one and only eternal soul (Mark 8:34-38)!

Top Ten Reasons to Not Be a Christian

by: Trevor Bowen

Are you a Christian yet? If not, why not? Here are the top 10 reasons why some people delay in becoming a Christian, along with a brief response:

10. “A lot of Christians are hypocrites.” - This is a true statement. Many Christians are hypocrites. This should not be too surprising, because there are bad apples in every basket. The standard to which God calls us should not be judged by a few bad apples. Besides, would you rather spend a few years, putting up with a few hypocrites in church, or spend eternity with all of them in hell? (Matthew 13:24-43)

9. “I am not good enough.” - When one becomes a Christian, it is not because he or she is good. In fact, we become Christians because we recognize that we are not good. We are sinners. The redemption of the Christian is based on grace and faith, not one’s own righteousness (Romans 3:21-28). If it was based on righteousness, nobody would be a Christian, much less be saved (Romans 3:23; James 2:10-11).

8. “I do not know enough.” - Do you believe there is a God? Do you believe that Jesus is His Son, who died on the cross to save us from our sins, and was resurrected to give us hope? Are you willing to accept Him as your Lord and Savior, to follow Him wherever He leads you? His commands are simple: After hearing the gospel, you must believe, repent from your sins, confess Him, and be immersed in water into His body (Romans 10:8-18; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). The rest will come with time and diligence (I Peter 5:10; Hebrews 5:12-14). Trust Him.

7. “It is too hard.” - Being a Christian is hard work. Before one becomes a Christian they should count the cost, and commit themselves to Christ, whatever the cost (Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). However, you should know that choosing not to be a Christian will produce a life that is even harder (Matthew 11:28-30). To help us, God has provided spiritual tools that enable us to grow as a Christian and overcome this life (II Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18). These tools are only available to Christians (Ephesians 1:3). If we run away from the difficulties of being a Christian, we will run straight into a trapped life of ruin and misery, which will bring insurmountable and eternal difficulties.

6. "I am too wicked. God could not forgive me." - What have you done? Have you persecuted Christians? Forcing them to blaspheme their own Savior through slow and painful torture? Have you persecuted them to the point of death? If God can accept Saul, the persecutor of Jesus and Christians (I Timothy 1:13-16; Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-22), and if He can forgive those who crucified His own Son (Luke 23:33-34; Acts 2:36-47), then will He not readily accept you (Luke 15:1-32)? Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, including yours (I John 2:2; I Timothy 2:5-6).

5. "But, that means my family is going to hell!" - Once someone realizes the truth of his condemned state, it does not take long before he considers the fate of his loved ones. This realization often produces much worry and heartache. Such a person may allow this concern to overpower his desire to save himself. However, denying the truth will not change their true state before God (I Corinthians 4:1-5). The only real hope of saving your loved ones is to first become a Christian, and then you can reach out to them with the gospel. Ignoring the judgment to come does not make it go away. Turning a blind eye only makes condemnation inevitable (Romans 11:7-10).

4. "God is merciful. He would not condemn me." - God truly is merciful. He does not want any to be lost (II Peter 3:9). That is why He gave His Son to be sacrificed upon the cross, thereby giving us an opportunity to be saved (John 3:16). However, the Lord is also just, and He will one day return unexpectedly, as a "thief in the night" (I Thessalonians 5:1-3). Then the door of opportunity will be closed, and only those who are prepared will be saved (Matthew 25:1-13). At that time, He will be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (II Thessalonians 1:7-8). This is God's promise and warning. Will you ignore the warning?

3. "I am a good, moral person. God would not condemn me." - On that last great day, there will be many surprised people, whom we might would consider good, moral people. Many might have even acknowledged Him as Lord (Matthew 7:21). Some might have gone so far as to have performed many great works in His name (Matthew 7:22). However, if they have not obeyed and performed according to the Lord's command, then Jesus will not recognize them, and they will be eternally condemned (Luke 13:23-27; Matthew 7:21-23). Are you obeying the Lord's command (Mark 16:15-16)?

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If We Believed What They Believed

by: Gary Kerr

One of the reference works I usually keep close at hand when studying any part of the New Testament is the paraphrase translation of J.B. Phillips, *The New Testament In Modern English*. I don't agree with all of Phillips' suggested wording, but I often find his efforts helpful in clarifying some particular passage or point. The translation was originally produced in sections, with the first, *Letters To Young Churches (Romans through Colossians)*, being published in London during World War II (it included a preface and recommendation written by C.S. Lewis).

In his introduction to that book, Phillips writes the following about the New Testament epistles and their authors and recipients:

“Without going into wearisome historical details, we need to remember that these letters were written, and the lives they indicate were led, against a background of paganism ... Slavery, sexual immorality, cruelty, callousness to human suffering, and a low standard of public opinion, were universal; travelling and communications were chancy and perilous; most people were illiterate. Many Christians today talk about the ‘difficulties of our times’ as though we should have to wait for better ones before the Christian religion can take root. It is heartening to remember that this faith took root and flourished amazingly in conditions that would have killed anything less vital in a matter of weeks. These early Christians were on fire with the conviction that they had become, through Christ, literally sons of God - they were pioneers of a new humanity, founders of a new Kingdom. They still speak to us across the centuries. Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved.”

That final sentence is profound and powerful -- “Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved!”

Within a generation of the establishment of the church, the apostle Paul could write of those who carried the gospel message that “their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (Romans 10:18). Paul wrote about the gospel that it had been preached “in all the world” and that it had been “proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (Colossians 1:6, 23). This is an incred-

ible achievement -- to begin with a few comparatively unknown and uneducated people (cf. Acts 4:13), and to have a message that did not appeal to the “wise,” the “mighty,” or the “noble” according to the flesh (1 Corinthians 1:26). But they had strong faith and a zeal born of that faith, that caused them to launch out boldly and sacrificially, to the point of being willing to give up their lives for the cause they had taken up. And God gave them amazing success. They were “on fire” for the kingdom, for the gospel, and for the souls of their fellow human beings, believing with all their hearts in the sacrifice and promises of Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of men. Being a Christian and going to heaven meant everything to them, and they wanted “all creation under heaven” to share with them in these blessings.

Do not be deceived into thinking that their achievements were easily accomplished. Right from the start they were opposed and persecuted. When the first of their number was martyred, such a widespread persecution developed that all except the apostles were driven from their homes and scattered abroad (cf. Acts 8:1). But this did not slow them down or dampen their enthusiasm. Wherever they went, they were found “preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). They preached it as they had opportunity, not depending on others (i.e., preachers, elders, etc.) to do the work for them. Each Christian considered him/herself both privileged and responsible to win souls for Christ. Their cause was new -- they were pioneers.

I fear that today we do not appreciate our “spiritual blessings” as they did. It is not our life as it was theirs. We are not spending and being spent for it as they were. To some degree, at least, perhaps we do not “believe what they believed.”

“Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we might achieve what they achieved.” If we did, I am convinced that God would give us success, too.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM

Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

Daily Bible Reading

October 2018

October 1	Hosea 1:1-2:1	October 17	Joel 1:1-12
October 2	Hosea 2:2-23	October 18	Joel 1:13-20
October 3	Hosea 3:1-4:10	October 19	Joel 2:1-17
October 4	Hosea 4:11-19	October 22	Joel 2:18-32
October 5	Hosea 5	October 23	Joel 3
October 8	Hosea 6:1-7:10	October 24	Amos 1
October 9	Hosea 7:11-8:14	October 25	Amos 2
October 10	Hosea 9	October 26	Amos 3
October 11	Hosea 10	October 29	Amos 4
October 12	Hosea 11-12	October 30	Amos 5:1-15
October 15	Hosea 13	October 31	Amos 5:16-27
October 16	Hosea 14		

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