

Today we're going to be looking at the first and last commands Jesus gave in his time on Earth. Like bookends to his ministry, they hold the entire reason that he came. There are a couple of verses we'll be looking at today, so please stand with me if you're able as we read read Mark 1: 17 & 18 and Matthew 28: 18 – 20.

Back when I first got out of college, I moved to Massachusetts. I lived in an apartment in Maynard, and directly behind the apartment building was the Assabetts River. I don't know if there were any fish in that river, and even if there were I probably wouldn't have eaten them, but I used to wade out to a big rock in the middle of the river and sit there for hours with my fishing pole. The real reason that I went out there was for a little quiet time by myself, and although I took along a pole it was only so I looked like I had a reason to be there. On the end of the

line rather than a hook and bait, I would tie a rock. I spent many hours with my line in the Assabett, but was I really fishing? Jesus said that as his followers we are to be fishers of men, but sometimes I wonder if we are really fishing, or just going through the motions.

We've talked before about needing to have a sense of urgency in reaching our community for Christ. Knowing how important it is that those around us come to know Jesus, knowing that what's at stake is where they will spend eternity, you'd think we would be sharing Jesus every time we open our mouths... I don't know about you, but that's not the case for me.

Have you ever felt hesitant to share the gospel because you thought the other person simply would not be interested? Have you ever felt God leading you to share with someone, but you heard a small voice telling you,

“You’ll only start an argument” or “They’ll think you’re being pushy”? Have you been slow to share your faith because you’re unsure what to say or do, or you didn’t feel you had the gift of evangelism, and witnessing is better left to those with “the gift?”

Every Christian has felt this way at one time or another. I know I have. But I’ve never found anything in the Bible that supports those reasons for not witnessing. In fact, God’s Word shows five key concepts for every Christian concerning witnessing.

I. Christ has given a clear command to every Christian.

To paraphrase Jesus Christ’s last command to the Christian community, he said “You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere”. This command, which the church calls the Great Commission, was not intended only for the 11 remaining apostles, or just

for the disciples who were there that day, or only for those now who have the gift of evangelism. This command is the duty and privilege of every person who confesses Christ as Lord. God's word isn't a smorgasbord, and we can't pick and choose which commands of our Lord we will follow. God opens up unique witnessing opportunities to you, sometimes in the most unlikely of circumstances. He doesn't expect eloquence, but He does expect obedience.

II. Every person is lost without Jesus Christ.

In John 14:6 Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me". In Acts 4:12, God's Word also reminds us, "There is salvation in no one else! Under all heaven there is no other name for men to call upon to save them".

So often the world looks at Christians as being arrogant, narrow-minded, and bigoted. They may concede that

Christianity is one of many ways to God, but the fact that we are unwilling to believe that other religions may lead to God offends them. Well, my response to that is, “Tough noogies!”

The bottom line is that, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me” was a claim that Jesus Christ made about Himself, not one that we have invented on our own. Jesus made claims about Himself, but His life, death, and resurrection all demonstrated that He was truly the Son of God and that the claims he made were true. If we were to accept that any other religion could be a way to God we would be saying that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic when he claimed to be the only way to God. Men and women are truly lost without Jesus Christ. According to God’s Word, He is the only way to bridge the gap between humankind and God. Without Him, people can’t know God and can’t have the assurance of eternal life.

III. We may assume that people are “not interested,” ... But in reality, the people of the world are truly hungry. They just don’t know that the answers they are looking for are in Jesus.

For whatever reason, we lose sight of the fact that God is constantly at work in peoples’ lives, that all around us, “The fields are white unto harvest” and are ready now for reaping. Instead of assuming that they aren’t interested, we need to assume that the family member, neighbor, coworker, or person we’ve just met will be not only interested in the good news we have to tell, but hungry for it. We need to always assume a positive response. We don’t know what God has been doing in that person’s life to prepare them to receive Jesus Christ. God may have been leading the person to an awareness of their need for truth, and you may be the person God has placed in their life to share that truth. To tie

together the first three points of us being ready, people being lost, and people seeking Christ, let me tell you a story from my life... Probably 8 or 10 years ago, Cindi and I were in bed asleep when a knock on the door woke us at close to midnight. A lady from our neighborhood who knew that we are “church people” was at our door. I don’t know if she was having a mental episode or what was going on with her, but she had convinced herself that the world was going to end that night and was terrified that, because her youngest child hadn’t been baptized, she was going to go to hell, so she wanted me to baptize her. There in the middle of the night I got to explain to her the truth that salvation is through faith in Jesus and that baptism is just an outward expression of the change that has taken place in our life. She replied, “That makes sense” and went back home feeling much better. The encouraging thing to me was that, even though

we had virtually no contact with this woman prior to this, when she was in trouble, she came to us because she had seen something different in our lives.

IV. We Christians have in our possession the greatest gift available to mankind—the greatest news ever announced.

Christ is risen! We serve a living Savior, who not only lives within us in all His resurrection power, but also has assured us of eternal life. He died on the cross in our place, for our sin, then rose from the dead. Mohammed died... He's still dead. Buddha died... He's still dead. Confucius died... He's still dead. We alone serve a living God who died and rose again. We have direct fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. And this fellowship, this peace, this gift of eternal life is available to all who receive Him.

Why are we so hesitant to share this good news? Why is it that we so readily discuss our political views or athletic

preferences, our gas mileage or utility bills, our children's growing pains or our office gossip, but clam up when it comes to discussing the greatest news ever announced?

If our faith in Christ really means as much to us as it should, then it only follows that the reason for our faith should be the number one message on our lips. People *want* to hear good news. And when you present it in the power of the Holy Spirit and with love, you will usually see a positive response.

V. The love of Jesus Christ for us, and our love for Him, compels us to share Him with others.

In John 14:21 Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me". In other words, Jesus measures our love for Him by our obedience to Him. John 14:21 goes on to say that as we obey, He promises He

will reveal Himself to us: “He who loves me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him, and show Myself to him”.

What are we to obey? When it comes to witnessing, we have the specific commandment from Jesus Christ: “You are to go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere”. Helping to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission is both a duty and a privilege. We share Christ because we love Christ. We share Christ because He loves us. We share Christ because we want to honor and obey Him. We share Christ because He gives us a special love for others.

Along with that, we are also called to be obedient to God’s daily guidance as He brings us into contact with people from all walks of life. We’ve probably all experienced that urging deep inside telling us, “Tell this person about Jesus Christ.” But, for one reason or another we are tempted to neglect or ignore the whisper and proceed with “more important

things.” But in reality, what could be more important? We never know if or when we’ll have another chance. One of the deepest regrets of my life is one of those missed chances. My dad had undergone major surgery and was due to be going home in a few days. I had that voice in my head, very urgently saying to call him and share Christ with him. I was going to be going home to visit him that weekend, and so I ignored the voice even though it was very persistent... “Call your dad! Call your dad!” And then the voice stopped, and about a half hour later my mom called to tell me that dad had died suddenly. Jesus promised, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men”. It is our responsibility to follow Jesus. It is His responsibility to make us fishers of men. Jesus has commanded us to share the gospel, and men and women are lost without Him. They are hungry for the good news, and we Christians have in our possession the greatest

news ever announced. Our love for the Lord, and His love for us, compels us to obey Him as He leads us into the sharing opportunities of each day.

As you walk in prayerful fellowship with the Lord, whoever you may happen to meet, consider it a divine appointment.

Always be ready to share your faith. It could well be that

God has led that person to you because you know the good

news and that person needs to hear it. Be in prayer daily

that God will provide you with those divine appointments to

share your faith and love and the good news of Jesus with

those around you. Don't just sit on a rock in the middle of the

river of life and go through the motions... Jesus called us to

be fishers of men, and if we are not fishing for men, we are

not following Jesus. (Closing prayer)