

David W. Long, Pastor
Reformed Presbyterian Church
Lord's Day Morning
June 22, 2008
'Renewing Your Hearts and Vision' Series
#2

"Renewing our Outreach" II Corinthians 5:11-21

Introduction

This summer we are focusing our morning preaching around the theme of renewal. The series is called *Renewing Your Hearts and Vision*. Our goal is to be refreshed and strengthened by God particularly in areas of the life of the congregation that have been historically important to us. As we look back through our 40 years of history it is clear that there are particular purposes for which God called us as a church into existence. There are areas that have been strengths and focuses of the ministry that God has blessed and used for His glory. So our study on renewal has a particular focus. As we said earlier, sometimes we need to look back in order to see clearly ahead. We need to know what God has said and done and promised in order to know what to believe and expect and do.

So we began the series by looking at some general truths about renewal of the heart. We found that renewal is a work of God's grace that restores our place and our soul. Whether we are struggling with sin or weariness or discouragement, the answer is the same, we need to come to Christ for a new heart. There is nothing God is more please to do than restore our souls.

We've also studied the subject of renewing our vision. We reviewed the purpose statement of

this church and saw why and how God has called us to the particular things that He has.

Today we are going to talk about evangelism and outreach. Every Christian knows that spreading the good news of Christ is at the heart of our calling as believers. But how do you gain or regain a commitment to evangelism if it is absent or lagging? Sometimes we lack a commitment to evangelism because we don't understand the need; sometimes we are overcome by fear; sometimes we are too focused on our own pleasures so that a sense of spiritual urgency is dulled. Today we are going to see that renewing our passion for outreach will come as we remember who Jesus is and what He has done of us.

[II Corinthians 5:11-21]

There are many places in the Bible that command us to preach and teach the gospel. This passage is one of the clearest in terms of answering questions about the whys, whats and hows of evangelism.

I. Why should we care?

We live in a world that is incredibly self absorbed. *Take care of yourselves and let others take care of themselves* is the mantra of our day. We can find lots of reasons to not tell others of Christ. We let our fears, our busyness, our ignorance, our personal pursuits and sometime even our theology (although not good theology) feed us with excuses so that our consciences are soothed.

Paul gives us reasons that will motivate us to action.

a. The fear of the Lord.

While our personal fears may hold us back, there is another kind of fear that ought to propel us forward. Look at verse 11. *Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.*

How does the fear of the Lord motivate us to evangelism? The answer is found in verse 10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* Paul had this truth burned into his mind. Paul knew his theology. He wrote to us all about the sovereignty of God, the doctrine of election; the truths about irresistible grace. If anyone could have rationalized, from a theological position, a reason to *not* do evangelism, it was Paul. But the truth that Paul could not drive from his mind was the truth that his lost neighbor was going to one day stand before a holy God and face eternal judgment. Paul couldn't get the thought out of his mind that his neighbor's every thought, word and deed would be judged by Christ and that if his neighbor didn't know the forgiveness of Jesus, he was doomed.

And so what did he do? He persuaded men. I love the words Paul uses in this passage.

Persuade here in verse 11 and look over at verse 20. There he uses the word *implore* or *beg*. These are words of passion. When it came to evangelism, Paul used every resource he could. He was willing to engage men personally with the truth of the gospel and with great love and earnestness show them why they needed Jesus.

b. The love of Christ. (read vs. 14)

Why should you care about evangelism? Because Someone cared for you. Christ did something for you that no one else would do – He loved you unconditionally. He loved you, not because He had to; not because you deserved it; not because you were lovable; but because He wanted to.

You see, that experience of knowing somebody loves you, of knowing that you count, that you are important, that you have a future, that you are secure – there is nothing more motivating than love. If someone really loves you and demonstrates that love to you, you want to please them. Love like that constrains us; it controls us; it motivates and encourages and challenges us to love Him and to live for Him and to tell others about what they are missing and what they need. Who doesn't want to be loved? The message of the gospel is that God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

c. The Reality of Change.

The world we live in is not a world that is content. It is a world that wants change and improvement. It simply doesn't know where to look. The bookstores are filled with self help books that promise change. If you can convince people that you can improve their life, you can make a lot of money selling your goods or your methods.

Here is what Christ promises. *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.* The gospel will deal with a person's passed. It will wash away the sin. And it will bring power for a new life. If we believe that, we ought to be motivated to give people something that will really help them – not so that we can get rich, but so that they might be changed.

In your neighborhood or office right now there are people struggling with great problems. They are battling fears, wrestling with questions, struggling with addictions, and upset about all kinds of things. And while Christ doesn't promise us immediate deliverance from trouble, He does promise that He will make us new. He will change us and help. He

will give power and wisdom to live. And that ought to motivate us to reach out with the gospel.

The second question this passage answers is this:

II. What Should We Share?

Paul makes it simple here. And we can be glad. The message of the gospel is not complicated, even though the depths of God's character and the truths of the Bible can never be reached. Here's what Paul says you need to tell others: (vs 14 & 15)

One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Or if you prefer, look at verse 21. *He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

The thing you need to tell people is about Jesus. They need to know that He died and rose again from the dead and that He died to take away sins. They need to know that their sin can be forgiven if they will believe in Him.

You don't have to be able to answer every question. Too often we hold back from evangelism because we are worried we will be asked difficult questions. It's OK to not know all the answers. Just tell them about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's the right place to start.

Why Should I Care?

What Should I Share?

III. What Should I Do?

Look at verses 18-20 (read). What should you do? In short, embrace your identity. You are two things.

1. You are a reconciler.

To bring reconciliation there needs to be a change of attitude and relationship. At the heart of reconciliation is bringing together that which is separated. It's the mending of what is fractured. Men are separated from God because of their sin.

As Christians you know about this first hand. And Paul points to this personal experience as one of the reasons you are now reconcilers. You were separated from God but you have been restored to Him. And because you've been on both sides of the fence, so to speak, He has given you the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, you are to stand in the gap between fallen man and a holy God.

Now, we need to understand that we don't have the *power* of reconciliation – we can't make it happen. But we do have the *word* of reconciliation. We can preach the gospel, call men to repentance and faith, tell them of the hope of the gospel, and show them Christ. That's what it means to be a reconciler.

2. You are an ambassador.

As you know, an ambassador is someone who represents another. An ambassador speaks for his home land. He not only promotes the official positions and policies of the homeland, but he is to present the culture, value, and beauty of his homeland. He is the link for the people among whom he lives so that they can see and understand his homeland.

We are ambassadors for Christ because we are living in a world that is not our home and among a people who don't know God. So we not only represent the truths and demands of God, but we represent God to the people among whom we live. Seeing us they should know what it means to be like

Christ. Ambassadors are not free to do whatever they want. They are not their own.

Your words, your attitudes, your actions – where you go, what you do – all of these things reflect upon Christ. The world is watching you and drawing certain conclusions about God because of you. That ought to challenge us.

As we think about outreach and evangelism as a congregation, one of the things we want to reinforce is our commitment to and belief in the power of personal, friendship evangelism. We believe that the most effect form of reaching people for Christ is the witness you have with your friends and neighbors.

And so I want to challenge you to do a few things.

1. Pray for yourself. Ask God to give you a love for people and a realization that those in your life without Christ will one day stand before God. Ask the Lord to stir you up to love people. Ask Him to give you a growing awareness of the reality of the unseen. Too often we see people on the outside only. We see their good job, their nice house; their active social life, but we don't see that on the inside they are distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. Active evangelism begins inside our own hearts.
2. Pray for the lost. Often we challenge you to pray for those in your life who don't know Christ. Are there any people now whom you are praying for daily that they would come to know Jesus Christ?
3. Determine that you will identify with Christ among those who don't know Him and

seek to speak to them about Christ.
Evangelism usually happens because we decide we are going to speak, rather than because someone asks us about Christ. (Purposeful evangelism.)

4. Be ready to get involved in any opportunities that we have as a church to do evangelism.
 - a. Jail ministry needs.
 - b. New outreach initiative beginning this year in our neighborhood.
 - i. Explain.