

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/8/04 Brad Brandt

Value #5—"Evangelism: Taking the Good News to the World" **

Main Idea: According to the Bible God has given us three things that we must grasp if evangelism is going to be real in our lives.

I. God has given us a message (2 Cor 5:18-19; Rom 1:14-15).

A. It involves bad news.

1. We are sinners (Rom 3:9-18, 23; Gal 3:22).
2. God cannot tolerate sin (Gen 2:16-17; Rom 1:18; 6:23).
3. Judgment is certain (Rom 2:5-6, 16; Heb 9:27).

B. It involves good news.

1. In eternity past, God the Father chose to redeem a people (Eph 1:3-6).
2. In A.D. 30, God the Son died to redeem His people (Eph 1:7-12; John 17:1-4).
3. Presently, God the Holy Spirit is reaching lost people (Eph 1:13-14;

John 16:8-11).

↳ Whosoever will may come and be saved (John 6:37b).

↳ Those the Father has given the Son will come (John 6:37a; Acts 13:48).

II. God has given us a method (Matt 9:37-38).

A. Phase #1: Cultivate the soil.

1. We do this by living holy lives (1 Pet 3:15-16).
2. We do this by building redemptive relationships (Matt 9:10-13).

B. Phase #2: Sow the seed.

1. We must see the opportunities (Col 4:5-6).
2. We must tell people about Jesus (Acts 1:8).

C. Phase #3: Reap the harvest (John 4:34-38).

1. Call people to repent and believe.
2. Don't pick green fruit.

III. God has given us a motivation.

A. One incentive is the need of the lost (2 Tim 2:10).

B. The ultimate incentive is the glory of God (Hab 2:14; Rom 11:36).

Response: What are you doing about the harvest?

Try an experiment. Shake someone's hand, but do it with one stipulation. Use only three fingers. How does a handshake feel with just three fingers? Awkward. Wimpish. One thing's for sure. You can't get a good grip when you use only three of your five fingers. To get a grip it takes all five fingers, with the cooperation of the arm, and a good connection to the control center in the head.

In recent weeks we've engaged in a series I've entitled, *"Get a Grip: Seven Values of a Strong Christian and a Strong Church."* We're learning that strong churches are made up of people who are committed to seven things: worship, edification, loving one another, serving, evangelism, fellowship, and obedience.

Know this. The seven values are a package deal. It takes all seven to have a strong grip spiritually. You can't pick and choose. Worship is shallow unless it leads to edification. Edification becomes self-serving without love, service, and evangelism. A person can be committed to evangelism, but if he isn't firmly connected to the church he's in danger for he lacks the accountability and support that fellowship provides. And without a firm commitment to obey the Head, the other six commitments are suspect.

We need to devote ourselves to each of the seven values. It's impossible to neglect any and still be as strong as the Lord intends.

This morning we come to value #5. Strong churches and strong Christians are those who get a grip on evangelism. They don't just talk about it. They *value* it so much that they *do* it.

What is it that will make evangelism a reality in our lives? According to the Bible God has given us three things that we must grasp if we truly value evangelism.

I. God has given us a message (2 Cor 5:18-19; Rom 1:14-15).

We don't invent the message. God has already given it to us. And to do evangelism, we must start right here, by getting a firm handle on the message.

Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." According to this text, God has given us two things: a *ministry of reconciliation* and a *message of reconciliation*.

And this message is like fire in our bones. It compels us to speak. Paul shared in Romans 1:14-15, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."

When you get a handle on the message—or better yet, it gets a handle on you!—you can't help but speak!

Which raises the question, just what is this message? In a word, it's called the *gospel*. Paul said he preached *the gospel*. Not a gospel, but *the* gospel. What's the gospel? There's plenty of confusion these days, so allow me to answer that question carefully. No one can be saved without understanding the gospel. No one can do evangelism without knowing the gospel. Simply put, the gospel is a message involving two types of news.

A. It involves bad news. Here's the bad news, three undeniable realities.

1. *We are sinners (Rom 3:9-18, 23; Gal 3:22)*. We *all* are sinners, without exception. Paul explains in Romans 3:9-18, "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God...'"

Who enters this world righteous, that is, right with God? Who seeks God? Not one person. Here's the bottom line, verse 23, "For *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God."

I've done dozens and dozens of funerals over the years, and each time I ask family members and friends to tell me about their loved one. Almost always I hear the statement, "He was a *good* man," or, "She was a *good* woman." Ask the average person on the street and he'd say the same thing about himself. "I may not be perfect, but I'm basically a *good* person."

That's not the biblical assessment. When we compare ourselves with people, we might conclude we're okay. But God doesn't compare us with people. His standard is holiness, *His* holiness. "Be holy as I am holy," He says.

Are we holy, that is, absolutely perfect as He is perfect? Galatians 3:22 answers the question, "But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin..." That's our plight. We are *prisoners of sin*. That's reality #1 in our message.

2. *God cannot tolerate sin (Gen 2:16-17; Rom 1:18; 6:23)*.

At the very beginning of time God Himself made that clear when He said to Adam in the garden, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will *surely die* (Gen 2:16-17)."

But, of course, they ate. And they *died*. Granted, by the grace of God they retained physical life for a few more years, but they died *spiritually* the moment they disobeyed God. What's worse, by their act they separated the human race from God.

Realize this. Aside from Jesus, Adam and Eve were the only two innocent human beings to walk on this planet. Since the day they sinned, every person has entered this world, not morally neutral, but as a *sinner*. And God cannot tolerate sin.

Romans 1:18 states, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."

We are sinners. God cannot tolerate sin. Now reality #3...

3. *Judgment is certain* (Rom 2:5-6, 16; Heb 9:27). The next chapter in Romans explains (Rom 2:5-6), "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.'" Then verse 16, "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

What did Paul say he included in the message he preached? Judgment. Hebrews 9:27 puts it plainly, "... Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."

There's the bad news. We are sinners. God can't tolerate sin. Judgment is certain.

B. It involves good news. The good news is that God has done something to remove the bad news! Indeed, all three persons of the Triune Godhead are involved in this work called redemption. We could spend weeks exploring the doctrine of salvation, but for our purposes I merely want to highlight the contributions made by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here is the good news...

1. *In eternity past, God the Father chose to redeem a people* (Eph 1:3-6). Ephesians 1 begins with a doxology of praise. Note that Paul exalts all three persons of the Trinity for their work in our redemption. He begins with God the Father. Let's walk through the passage phrase by phrase, making comments as we go:

Verse 3—"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Paul praises the Father. For what?

Verse 4—"For he chose us [note the Father initiated the action; He "chose" us in order to rescue us; But how?] in him [that's in Christ; And when did the Father initiate this redemptive plan?] before the creation of the world [in eternity past, before God spoke the first molecule into existence] to be holy and blameless in his sight."

Verse 5—"In love he predestined [the word means "to decide beforehand," "to predetermine," "to foreordain"] us [with this pronoun Paul includes himself and the Ephesian believers] to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ [there's the reason for this sovereign election; God the Father has chosen an undeserving people to become part of His family, making them His sons; On what basis did the Father make this choice?], in accordance with his pleasure and will [God was uninfluenced by anything outside of Himself in this choice; He didn't choose the 'best' of sinful mankind; He chose whom He willed to choose, all undeserving; And what effect should this knowledge of God's electing love have on those He has chosen?].

Verse 6—"To the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves [God deserves and desires praise for His grace, His unmerited, unsolicited favor upon us]."

There's the Father's role in the good news. In eternity past the Father designed a plan to save undeserving sinners. He chose to redeem a people.

2. *In A.D. 30, God the Son died to redeem His people (Eph 1:7-12; John 17:1-4).* In Ephesians 1:7 the doxology begins to highlight the Son's contribution:

Verses 7-8—"In him [that's in *Christ*] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." What did the Son do? He died for the undeserving sinners the Father chose to love. Specifically, Paul says that Christ shed His blood to provide redemption, a term which means "to buy back," and forgiveness.

Move ahead to the end of this doxology to the Son, verses 11-12—"In him [once again, that's *Christ*] we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will [that's God the Father again], in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

Please note those final words. It's the second mention of the purpose of redemption, the same as in verse 6. What the Son did should produce the same result as what the Father did. God did what He did for the *praise of His glory*.

Granted, God's plan of salvation results in our good, but its purpose is primarily about the glory of God. Jesus actually mentioned this in his prayer in John 17:1-4:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life *to all those you have given him* [to whom does the Son give eternal life? To the ones the Father has given Him, the ones Paul described in Ephesians 1, the ones the Father chose and predestined to like His Son]. Now this is eternal life: that they [the ones the Father gave to the Son, elsewhere referred to as the *elect*] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."

We learn here that before the Son ever came into the world, the Father gave Him two things. He gave His Son a *love gift* (verse 2) and a *work* (verse 4). The love gift were the people the Father chose to become instruments of praise for His Son. The work was the work of redemption. The Father gave the people to His Son, and the Son came to redeem those people.

What did this work of redemption include? The Son came to do for His people what they couldn't do for themselves. He lived a perfect life, then gave His life as a sacrificial lamb on the cross, dying in the place of His people. By means of the Son's death, the Father would forgive the sins of the people He chose to give His Son, and by means of His Son's perfect life the Father would credit to those sinful people the righteous merit of the Son's life. Consequently, they who once were God's enemies would become God's sons!

So the Father chose a people and the Son died to redeem them. What about God the Holy Spirit? He, too, has a role in our salvation.

3. *Presently, God the Holy Spirit is reaching lost people (Eph 1:13-14; John 16:8-11).* Paul describes the Spirit's work in Ephesians 1:13-14 "...Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, *the promised Holy Spirit*, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory."

What part does the Holy Spirit play in the plan of redemption? He *guarantees* our inheritance. In other

words, He makes sure that those the Father has chosen and the Son has died to redeem will in fact receive their inheritance. To put it another way, using the words of John Murray, the Spirit applies what the Son accomplished.

The Father's work was in eternity past. The Son's work took place on a hill outside of Jerusalem in A.D. 30. The Holy Spirit's work is happening right now.

It's the Holy Spirit who convicts sinners of their need for Christ (John 16:8-11). He extends an effectual call (Rom 8:30). He grants sinners the ability to repent and believe in Christ (Eph 2:8-9; Acts 5:31). He applies the benefits of justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification to God's people.

Quite frankly, the Spirit is the One who makes evangelism possible. How else could we ever convince spiritually dead sinners to trust Christ? We couldn't. But The Spirit can and He does! That's why we can do evangelism with confidence, because the Spirit guarantees people will be saved.

"Which people?" you ask. I don't know. Only God knows. But He wanted us to know that He knows. That's why He told us in His Word about His eternal plan. The doctrine of God's electing love makes evangelism possible. We can preach Christ knowing there will be results. God will save His people.

Some will ask, "Well, doesn't this remove human responsibility?" Not if we remember the biblical balance. You say, "What's the 'biblical balance'?" It's the balance you see whenever the Scriptures talk about salvation.

Take, for instance, Jesus' teaching in John 6:37. Jesus made two things perfectly clear in this verse. At the end of the verse He emphasized truth #1.

⊢ Whosoever will may come and be saved (John 6:37b). He said, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." No one who ends up in hell will be able to claim, "But I never had a chance. I wanted to be saved, God, but You wouldn't let me." No way. The Bible is full of "whosoever" texts. "For God so loved the world... that *whosoever* believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)."

Yes, the Bible teaches that whosoever will may come. It also teaches truth #2.

⊢ Those the Father has given the Son will come (John 6:37a; Acts 13:48). John 6:37 again, this time the whole verse. Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Who did Jesus say will come? The people the Father gave to Him. Yes, whosoever will may come—and so we offer the gospel to all without discrimination. But the question is, who wills to come? Jesus answers that question in John 6:44, "No one can come to me *unless the Father who sent me draws him...*"

And that is what the Father is doing! He is drawing spiritually dead people to Himself all over this world. That fact propels us to preach the gospel with assurance.

Acts 13:48 is another "biblical balance" text. In describing the effect of Paul's evangelistic efforts in Pisidian Antioch, Luke records, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord [there's the human response]; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed [there's what made the human response possible, God's sovereign choice]."

So God has given us a message. To get a grip on evangelism, we must get a grip on this message. We must be able to present both the bad news and the good news.

II. God has given us a method (Matt 9:37-38).

Listen to Jesus' words in Matthew 9:37-38, "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"

There's God's method. Evangelism is like farming. And like farming, evangelism involves a three step process. If you want a crop you must follow these three steps.

A. Phase #1: Cultivate the soil. What happens if you throw good seed on uncultivated soil? Not much.

Growing up I used to watch the farmers in the springtime. They spent a lot of time out in their fields working the soil. Perfectly good seeds rot on the surface if the soil isn't prepared to receive it.

The hearts of lost people are like soil. How do we cultivate those hearts?

1. *We do this by living holy lives (1 Pet 3:15-16).* "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against *your good behavior* in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."

What happens when a "Sunday-Christian" does evangelism? It's counterproductive, isn't it? The unsaved person may smile politely, but inside he's thinking, "Give me a break. You say Jesus could change my life, but it doesn't look like He's making much of a difference in yours." Hypocrisy hardens the lost.

On the other hand, holy living cultivates interest. "What makes you so different?"

2. *We do this by building redemptive relationships (Matt 9:10-13).* Like Jesus did. How did our Savior treat unsaved people? In Matthew 9 Matthew recalls an event that occurred right after his conversion (verses 10-13):

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

What's your attitude towards the lost people around you? Perhaps you're offended by their wicked behavior. The Lord is, too. Their behavior needs to change. But how will it change? We'll reach them, Jesus said, not with a pointed finger, but with *mercy*.

What have you done recently to build a redemptive relationship with your unsaved neighbor or workmate? Reaching the lost starts by cultivating the soil.

B. Phase #2: Sow the seed. The seed is the Word of God. It's good to befriend lost people—of course, while maintaining your godly standard—but it's not enough. Faith comes by *hearing*. And if we're going to sow the seed we must do two things.

1. *We must see the opportunities (Col 4:5-6).* In Colossians 4:5-6, Paul offers this counsel, "Be wise in the way you act toward *outsiders*; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

The Greek word for "make the most of every opportunity" is *exagorazomai*. It means, "to buy the time, to redeem," hence, "to make good use of opportunity." If we are going to sow the seed we must *buy up opportunities*.

2. *We must tell people about Jesus (Acts 1:8).* Our mission is clear. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will *be my witnesses*..."

Maybe it goes without saying, but the fact is, too often we *go without saying!* That is, we talk to lost people about everything but the *main* thing! It's fine to talk about family values, church programs, and Bible stories, but that's not witnessing. Jesus said to tell people *about Him*.

Let's look at two biblical examples of witnessing, noting the content of the witness:

--Listen to Peter in Acts 3:15-16, "You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."

--Another example is Peter in Acts 10:39, "We are witnesses of everything he [Jesus] did..." That's the job of a witness, to tell people *what Jesus did*.

And that's our assignment, beloved, to tell people about Jesus. Sow the seed.

C. Phase #3: Reap the harvest (John 4:34-38). Do you remember the time Jesus did personal evangelism with the woman at the well? Do you remember what He told the disciples right *after* the woman left? Listen to John 4:34-38:

"'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.'"

Jesus said the fields are *ripe for harvest*. This is the age of salvation. There are people around us that are ready to be saved. With some folks we must cultivate. With others we must sow the seed. But with still others, the hard work is done. It's time to reap the harvest. You say, "How?" What do I do in phase #3? Simply this...

1. *Call people to repent and believe.* "Bob, you have admitted you are a sinner. You realize your good works won't merit God's favor. You know the truth about Jesus and His atoning sacrifice. The question is this. Will you right now repent of your sins and place your confidence in Christ alone? Will you receive Him, Bob?"

And if the Spirit has prepared Bob's heart, you'll see a harvest! What if the Spirit hasn't? Then a word of caution...

2. *Don't pick green fruit.* Our job is to cultivate, sow the seed, and call for a response. It's the Holy Spirit's work to grant genuine repentance and faith. We can't do that. Some try. They use emotionalism to get people to "make a decision." In so doing they settle for a deficient response that produces a deficient result, namely, a person who calls himself a Christian but doesn't know Christ. Please, don't pick green fruit.

God has given us a message—let's preach it. And a method—let's use it. Thirdly...

III. God has given us a motivation.

You say, "Why should I get serious about evangelism?" Here are two incentives.

A. One incentive is the need of the lost (2 Tim 2:10). Did you realize that within a fifteen minute drive of our church there are about 22,000 out of 33,000 people who aren't in church right now? That's two out of three people right around us who need to hear the clear, life-changing Word. Think of the folks on your street.

Now think of the world. Of the six billion people on this planet, a little over two billion claim to be "Christian" (in the broadest sense of the term). The vast majority of the world's population is lost and heading for a Christ-less eternity.

Let that sink in, fellow Christian. The need is overwhelming. That need would overwhelm us if we didn't keep in mind that God has His people out there. It was the doctrine of election that motivated Paul to do evangelism, as he shared from his prison cell right before his execution. 2 Timothy 2:10—"I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."

That's one incentive for evangelism, the need of the lost. People need the Lord. But we have a higher motivation, one that ought to thrust us into harvest work.

B. The ultimate incentive is the glory of God (Hab 2:14; Rom 11:36). Listen to the prophecy in Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

John Piper writes, "Missions [I'll insert the word *evangelism*] is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions [evangelism] exists because worship doesn't...When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more...Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions [evangelism]. It's the goal of missions [evangelism] because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory."

Yes, worship is the fuel in evangelism. The reason evangelism exists is because worship doesn't. That's why we must do evangelism, because God deserves glory from people who are presently not giving Him glory. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom 11:36)."

In his biography, *The Persecutor*, Sergei Kourdakov tells the story of his upbringing as a devoted Communist in the former Soviet Union. Born in 1950 Sergei moved through the ranks to become a leader in the youth communist movement. As a 20 year old he was paid big money to work for the undercover department of the police force. His job? To find and eliminate house churches. He conducted some 150 "raids" in a two year period. Until the Lord broke into his life and revealed his folly.

It happened on what turned out to be his last raid. Sergei describes his "Damascus road" experience as follows:

"At the door we paused briefly, my men beside me, waiting for the starting signal. Suddenly I shouted, 'Now!' and the raid was on. The door was unlocked—obviously they weren't expecting us—and we burst in on them. As the informant had predicted, there were fifteen or sixteen Believers present, packed in tightly and sitting close together. We had caught them in the middle of prayer.

Vladimir Zelenov reached and grabbed a Bible from the Believer, ripping it apart. One of the women cried out, 'Why? Why do you do that?' It was a hurt, deep cry, but it irritated Vladimir, and he smashed her full in the face. It was a professional, well-aimed blow that would have flattened any man, much less a frail little woman. She flew back against the other Believers and crumpled to the floor, her face bleeding.

Screams split the air as my men went to work...

I saw an old woman near the wall, fear on her face, lips trembling in prayer. I couldn't hear what she was saying because of the noise. Her praying infuriated me and I raised my club to hit her. She suddenly saw me, poised, ready to strike, and she prayed loudly. I listened for a second to her prayer, more out of curiosity than anything. As my arm was raised, ready to lower my club on her defenseless head, I heard her words: 'God, forgive this young man. Show him the true Way. Open his eyes and help him. Forgive him, dear God.'

I was stunned. Why doesn't she ask help for herself instead of me? She's the one about to be finished off. I was angered that she, a nobody, would be praying for me, Sergei Kourdakov, a leader of the Communist Youth League. In a flash of rage, I gripped my club tighter and prepared to smash it against her head. I was going to hit her with all my might, enough to kill her. I started to swing. Then the strangest thing happened to me. I can't describe it. Someone grabbed my wrist and jerked it back. I was startled. It was hurting. It was not imaginary. It was a real squeezing on my wrist until it actually pained. I thought it was a Believer, and I turned around to hit him. But there was no one there!

I looked back. *Nobody* could have grabbed my arm. And yet, somebody had grabbed me! I still felt the pain. I stood there in shock. The blood rushed to my head. I felt hot as fright swept over me. This was beyond me. It was confusing, unreal. Then I forgot everything. Dropping my club, I ran out, with the blood rushing to my head and a hot, flushed feeling in my face. Tears began flowing down my cheeks.

Since I was four years of age I had cried only once that I could remember...I never cried. I was too tough to cry, I thought. No one will ever make me cry, I had vowed. Crying was a sign of weakness. But now, as I ran from that nightmare scene, I was crying. Real tears were coursing down my cheeks. I was bewildered, lost. Things were happening that I did not understand...."

What Sergei didn't understand is that the Sovereign Lord was after him, not to punish him as he deserved, but to save him. Sergei didn't accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior that night—he didn't even know the truth about Jesus yet. But in the months that followed God enabled him to learn the truth, and then the Spirit opened his eyes and granted Sergei repentance and faith in Jesus.

I share that story for two reasons. First, it illustrates the *sovereignty of God* in salvation. Sergei wasn't looking for God. He didn't even believe in God. Yet the Spirit of God was looking for him, pursuing him, graciously, relentlessly, in order to save him from his rebellious ways. The Spirit is doing the same this very moment, perhaps in your life.

This story reveals something else, the necessity of *human responsibility* in salvation. God uses people to reach people. I don't know the woman's name that prayed for Sergei. He never found out. But she made a choice that day. She chose to go to church even though the danger was real. She chose to pray aloud that day even if meant personal harm. She chose to pray for her enemy's forgiveness rather than her own protection. And God used that woman as an instrument to reach an atheist by the name of Sergei Kourdakov.

My friends, the fields are ripe. The question simply is this...

Response: What are you doing about the harvest?

Will you choose today to make evangelism the priority God intends in your life?