

The Believer's Joy, Privilege, and Responsibility to Proclaim the Gospel

Romans 1:16-17

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

THE PURPOSE: My desire is that God will use this message to inspire, encourage each of us to look for the opportunities to boldly declare the gospel. If God has saved you, you have been rescued from destruction. There was a moment in time that you were privileged to hear the gospel, and our Father granted you the ears to hear and eyes to see, and the gifts of faith and repentance as you heard the Word of God. Now you have the joy, privilege, and responsibility to proclaim this same good news to those that He brings to you. The time is now. This is a call to take up your sword, and enter the spiritual battle for the souls of men!

THE CHALLENGE: Here is the challenge. We often fail to see these opportunities to proclaim the gospel because we are not looking for them. Sometimes, when we do see a possibility, we feel unprepared, or worse, don't care enough to speak up and get involved. And if you are anything like me, the real issue is that you are sometimes afraid of rejection, embarrassment and humiliation. I am confessing before you all today that I am sometimes ashamed of the gospel. I am ashamed because the true gospel is a message that makes other people uncomfortable and exposes their weakness and sin. It reveals the fact that though everyone has a conscience and has a sense of right and wrong, they often choose to do what is wrong. It gospel message also works at a deeper level. Even when people do good things, their motives are self serving, and they do good works for their own glory, happiness and personal satisfaction without regard for the glory of God. The gospel exposes every person as deficient, unclean, rebellious, and deserving of God's punishment, anger, rejection and judgment. People don't like that message. They reject it because it makes them accountable to God for their life and actions. They resist admitting their own depravity and weakness. And they certainly want to ignore the coming consequences of death and judgment that awaits them in the future. The Word of God always confronts man in his sin and disobedience, and declares Him bankrupt, undone, guilty, and under God's condemnation and wrath apart from a mediator and Savior.

To add fuel to the fire, when we live lives worthy of our Savior, lives of holiness, purity, morality, humility, submission, goodness, love, kindness, self control, and longsuffering, we become a bright light that exposes the sin of others. Consequently, hatred and anger is the response of sinners as they are confronted with the truth of their condition. The anger that they have toward God is often expressed toward those who are living righteous lives. Often, the most intense anger and persecution comes from those who are religious and have a form of godliness, but in fact have a deficient self-righteousness based on their own good work and effort. True humility and godliness exposes shallow religion and hypocrisy.

Please don't misunderstand me at this point. I do not believe our Lord has called us to be obnoxious, unkind, self-righteous, arrogant, pharisaical, and mere moralists that come down on other's sins. You can elicit persecution and ill treatment by just being obnoxious and unkind. What I am saying is that though we may be gentle, kind, and loving, the gospel message is an offense to those who are unsaved. We are not to be purposely offensive. We are to be loving, humble, easily entreated, full of mercy, good fruit, and pursuing peace. But the message that we bring confronts sinners with the truth about themselves, which is an offense.

Let's admit that the gospel is offensive to sinners. There are certainly deficient, man centered gospels, that present no offense at all. But if we choose to speak the truth clearly, boldly, and plainly, it will be offensive and distasteful to those who refuse to bow the knee.

The challenge is that when we proclaim the true gospel, we will be despised, rejected, misunderstood, maligned, mistreated, and even hated. Honestly, that does not appeal to me. I don't want to be despised, rejected, misunderstood, maligned, mistreated and hated by others. So the convenient thing to do is avoid the subject in conversation and never confront, or present a deficient religious message instead of the bold and powerful truth.

THE PROMISE:

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER RESPONSE AS WELL

For those that God is effectually calling, for the elect, for the ones that God chooses to rescue, for the lost and failing souls that belong to our Father, for the people who call out in their sinful state and cry for mercy, this same offensive message is the sweetest and most blessed sound ever heard. For not only does the true gospel expose the ugliness of sin of fallen man, it also reveals the beauty of the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is that this perfect Son of God offered His life as a sacrifice on the cross to bear the guilt and punishment for the sins for any person who will trust and obey. He offers release from the guilt, penalty and domination of sin to anyone who will humble themselves and turn away from their sin and turn to God for forgiveness and mercy. And that's not all. This same Jesus that offered His life for sinners and died on the cross and was buried three days, rose from the dead, conquered death and the grave, ascended into heaven, sent the Holy Spirit, and is returning soon to visibly rule this universe with all of those who have received Him as Lord and Savior. That is good news for all who have given their lives to Him. On the cross, Christ accepted the full judgment and fury of God's wrath towards sinners, and provided forgiveness and reconciliation to all who come to God through Him, trusting in His life, death, and resurrection.

Based on the wonder and glory of our Savior and what He has done, I want to give you three great reasons to overcome your timidity, shyness, fear and selfishness, and boldly proclaim the good news to all creation.

FIRST, WE SEE THE JOY

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ **Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**

The Parable of the Lost Coin

⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ **Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**"

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." ' ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; **he was lost, and is found.**' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was **dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.**' "

As we proclaim the good news, we need to realize that there are prodigals that belong to God that he seeking and saving. It is through the proclamation of the true gospel that he effectually calls His own home. And when the Spirit of God awakes these dead souls and brings them to life, and grants them repentance, there is rejoicing in heaven and on earth. The angels in heaven, the Father and the Son, and the saints here and those that have passed on, all rejoice in the rescue of a lost soul as they celebrate the amazing grace and mercy of a loving God that provided a way for sinners to be reconciled to their Creator.

But there is even a more amazing joy and blessing involved in the proclamation of the gospel.

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What is even more amazing is that there is a joy and blessing in suffering and persecution as well. As we proclaim the good news, there will be those who despise and hate the message, for it exposes their hypocrisy and sin. They will not only hate the message, but persecute the messengers as well. The Scripture teaches us that there is a joyous depth of fellowship with our Savior that can only come through suffering and persecution for His sake. There is a depth of joy and honor in being counted worthy to be identified with Christ as we are treated like He was; despised and rejected. We can rejoice in our sufferings for Christ as we are reminded that it was through the suffering and rejection of our Lord that our sins were taken and carried away. The gospel is a message of healing, reconciliation, and restoration that comes to us through suffering, punishment, and trial. It is in the darkness of our sin and its curse of death that the light of God's mercy and grace shines the brightest. And God often highlights His message through suffering and persecuted messengers. We are assured that the suffering that we experience is not even worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us when the former passes away and the eternal kingdom is established forever.

So we see the joy associated with the proclamation of the gospel.

SECOND, WE SEE THE PRIVILEGE

II Corinthians 4:7-12

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

The privilege is that God would use broken clay pots to deliver this priceless treasure. It is such an honor, as insufficient and weak people, to be entrusted with the most powerful message in the universe. We are privileged to experience the very power of God as we speak words that minister life and death. The power is not ours, but is inherent in the supernatural sovereign work of the Spirit of God as we faithfully proclaim the person and work of Jesus Christ. The privilege is that we are used by God to bring glory to our Savior, the One who bled and died to save us from our sins, the One who bore our shame, the One who was despised and rejected because of our rebellion and disobedience, the One who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, and is now exalted and at the right hand of the Father, the One who is calling sinners to faith and repentance, through His gospel that He has entrusted to us!

THIRD, WE SEE THE RESPONSIBILITY

God has ordained to save sinners and call His own to repentance through the preaching of the gospel. We have a responsibility to participate, and not draw back in shyness, timidity, unbelief, and fear. Beloved, we have a mission. We have a purpose. We have a joy and a privilege. And we will be held accountable. God is a saving God. He is calling weak and weary heavy laden sinners to salvation and repentance, and He is doing it through us. The fields are white. There are sheaves that are ready to be brought in. There are sheep to be rescued. There are lost to be sought and brought home. Go, and cry out, and command everyone to come to Christ for

forgiveness and salvation, and to flee the coming wrath. Today is the day of salvation. If you hear His voice and call, dare you hesitate and delay? And the gracious and amazing promise is that if you will call out for salvation and rescue and forgiveness, He will accept you and save you. And our responsibility is to go, and preach, and teach, and expound, and proclaim the good news to all creatures. We are called to scatter the seed to all peoples in every nation. And through that work, the sovereign God of heaven will call His people out of darkness into the light of the gospel. He will grant faith and repentance to sinners, and open blind eyes. He is God our Savior. He came to seek and save the lost.

LUKE 19:1-27

19 *He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

The Parable of the Ten Minas

¹¹ *As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. ¹² He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. ¹³ Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ¹⁴ But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ¹⁵ When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. ¹⁶ The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' ¹⁷ And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' ¹⁸ And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' ¹⁹ And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' ²⁰ Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; ²¹ for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' ²² He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? ²³ Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' ²⁴ And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' ²⁵ And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' ²⁶ 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ²⁷ But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.' "*

I am speaking directly to the hearts of every person that has received the gift of eternal life. You have been given a responsibility; a stewardship; a purpose; a mission. That mission is to go tell other people about Jesus, the One who came from heaven to die for sinners. That mission is to go and call people to turn away from their sin, and receive forgiveness and mercy and a new life. Our message is that though you are a sinner, deserving of God's judgment and wrath, you can exchange that for mercy, kindness, and a new life lived in submission to His rule and care. And there is a day, my brother, my sister, that you will stand before this One who gave His life for you, and account for what you did with this message and this calling. There is a responsibility to the One who gave it all, the captain of our salvation.

So what can we do? What is the appropriate response?

1. Know the gospel. Understand it. Savor it. Allow it to consume your thoughts and your emotions. Allow this to become your very food. Read good books that will help you understand it. Talk about it. Digest it.

Assimilate it. In doing so you will help yourself to be strong in the Lord, and you will be ready when the opportunity comes.

2. Pray for opportunities, and then know that those prayers will be answered. God is a saving God with a saving plan. This is His purpose, to save sinners. If you ask Him for opportunities, He will provide them (State Electric Story)
3. Discuss in your care group how we can provide ways for people to hear this message. How can we band together and take this gospel to others. Obviously, some are more gifted and prepared to explain and minister the gospel to others. All of us have unique connections and relationships. How can we be used as a team to bring the gospel to people?
4. Embrace suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ as an honor and privilege. Recognize that we are called to create discomfort and challenge the status quo, first in our own lives, and within our circle of influence. Realize and joyfully accept that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, and that it is through many trials we enter the kingdom. This is God's design and it is for our ultimate good and His glory.
5. Ask God to help you overcome your fear and timidity through love; love for your Savior and love for other people. All fear can be cast out by maturing and growing in love.