

The Heart of an Evangelist

I Corinthians 9:16-27

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*Briarwood Presbyterian Church
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I hope we have the privilege to hear from the Lord Jesus in this sermon. Let's pray.

Prayer: Great God our Father, how thankful we are that we could come into Your presence to worship You. We are thankful that You're here and that You will guide us through Your Word. Speak to us. Holy Spirit You authored these words through faithful men of old. Now use us to speak Your Words that we would hear You and see Jesus. It's in the Name of Christ that we pray, Amen.

We will be looking at I Corinthians 9. I do not apologize for reading from the Bible because it is the Word of God. It does not contain the Word of God. It does not become the Word of God. It is the Word of God. So when we read or hear it we have the opportunity to understand the heart and mind of God. So we should all pay close attention when God speaks. I Corinthians 9:16-27 says:

[16] For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! [17] For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. [18] What then is my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel. [19] For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. [20] To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. [21] To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. [22] To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. [23] I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. [24] Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. [25] Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. [26] So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. [27] But

I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

This ends the reading of God's Word for this study. It is from this portion that He would help us and encourage us from this study.

Here are two of my biggest frustrations in life. One is that there are too many lost people in the world. Secondly, is too few people join the church here by profession of faith. I believe God desires as He has said in His Word that all men would hear the Good News of His love and there is no way that you could explain that He does not desire for His people to be gathered together in body for community, life and love. If you don't think this is the best church in town for you and your friends to attend where you can hear the Gospel preached, fellowship and encourage one another, then you ought to go somewhere else. If you believe this is the place where you should be and where all of that can take place then invite your family and friends to come and join us.

Do you understand and realize that if every family in the church committed in the space of one year's time to share the Gospel with one family in the city, lead them and guide them to become a part of the Briarwood Church, in one year's time we'd double in size. I don't know a business in town that thinks they can survive on one sale a year and yet we seem to have lost our pizzazz about the Gospel and about Briarwood. I think we need to learn from this passage of Scripture what it means to have the heart of an evangelist.

In 1846 John Geddie was sent from Nova Scotia to the New Hebrides now Vanuatu. It was said of John when he died in 1872, "When he came there were no Christians, when he died there were no heathen." Would that be true of Birmingham?

Who would you say is the greatest church planter that has ever lived? It's not me. It's Paul. Who would you say is the greatest evangelist that has ever lived? Could be Paul, Billy Graham but I believe it could have been Jesus. I do believe from a human perspective that it was Paul. Paul was the greatest evangelist and church planter that ever lived. Surely we can learn from him what it means to be an evangelist with a heart for the church.

As we look at this passage of Scripture Paul wrote in I Corinthians 9:16 [16] *For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* He had a felt responsibility. He had come to that place of understanding that as a believer he was involved in the work of the Kingdom by God's appointment. Now he was not working for his salvation, he was working because he had salvation. I don't work to get a job at Briarwood. I'm on staff at Briarwood. I don't work to get married. I work at home because I am married. Paul was not working to earn favor with God. He was

working because of his standing with God. He felt that responsibility to the Lord and to the lost around him.

It was Paul that the Spirit led to pin those words “How can they believe on Him who they have not heard and how can they hear without someone to tell them” (Romans 10:14). Paul understood the responsibility that every believer has to share the Gospel with those who do not know Him, but there seems to be a sense of a lack of evangelism among the church today. When the church stops evangelizing something significant happens and goes awry. Evangelism is to the church what fizz is to a soda. There is very little that is as distasteful as a soda that has been sitting on the table for two or three days, even in the refrigerator if uncapped when all of the fizz and energy has dissipated. One of the most attractive things to see from a local congregation is to see the excitement and enthusiasm from the Lord and the Gospel that forces them into responsibility to share with those in the community who need to know Jesus.

A missionary named Dick Hart had labored ten years on his mission field. Over that period of ten years there had been two maybe three converts and he was asked “Why do you stay?” His response was “It is because Jesus put me here.” We need to understand that it is those of us who have come to understand the Gospel who have experienced God’s love and our sins forgiven that are compelled to share that Good News with others.

I have two signs that hang in my office to encourage me and help keep me on track. One says “Crossing the sea will not make you a missionary but seeing the cross will.” The other sign says “I can’t do everything but I can do something.” Paul felt the responsibility of being a child of God, saved by the grace of God and the understanding that he was to be the instrument of God in sharing that Good News with others.

I Corinthians 9:19-23 goes on to describe various ways that Paul says he sought to identify with the audience as he moved in and around the world. He looked for ways to find things in common with the people that he met. Dr. Barker reminded us recently significantly of this identification with the people that we meet. We are to look for ways to connect, whether it’s tennis or barbeque but to look for ways to bring people together. Paul listed various ways in which he sought to do that.

A very long time ago we moved to North Carolina because of part of our pastoral responsibilities. Shortly after arriving there I understood and learned that the younger men in the church were involved in a church softball league in the community. So I asked them if I could join the team. I found out later there was a little bit of moaning and groaning about the preacher wanting to play softball but he was the new preacher and they didn’t know how to tell him he couldn’t play. So I joined the team. A couple of weeks later during one of the games, I think the score was something like 22 to 5 and I think they thought they had the game

pretty well won, so they let me play. I got to bat twice that night and I hit a homerun both times. I started the next game.

One night as we were standing around and the game was going on, I walked up behind one of the young men on the team, laid my hand on his shoulder and said "Robert, I need to talk to you." This was Tuesday night. I said "How about when you get off work on Friday, come by the office so we can talk." About 5:30pm Friday the door opened and Robert came into my office. He worked at a concrete cement plant and concrete pipes and all. We lived outside the city. He also made concrete septic tanks. As we were going along in our conversation I finally turned to him and said "Robert..." He said "I took care of it already." I said "Excuse me?" He said "I've already taken care of it." I said, "Okay, what have you taken care of?" He said "You wanted to talk with me about the sin in my life." I said "That's true." He said "Last night before I went to bed I got down on my knees and had it out with God and He got it out of me. I wasn't about to come into this office and talk with you this afternoon with sin in my life between me and the Lord."

It was that relationship of the softball game that gave me the opportunity of pressing on his life about the Lord. He then said to me "Tom there are a lot of men in this little community that are never going to come to church to hear you preach." So I said "Then Robert how do we get the Gospel to them?" He said "I believe if we could have one of those Billy Graham type meetings down at the ballpark, they would come to the ballpark to hear somebody preach because they like to come to the ballpark." This young man who was two days a believer began the process of planning a community wide evangelistic outreach. During the course of the week when we preached every night at the ballpark we saw God bring life to 250 people. Two of which joined the Presbyterian Church and the 148 joined the Baptist church but they came to Jesus because one man felt the responsibility sharing with his friends and he looked for a way to connect with them to be able to introduce them to Jesus.

Maybe you have heard the name Paul Yonggi Cho. If you know that name you are as old as I am. His name today is David Yonggi Cho. I'm not sure when he changed his name but I know he did. He is Korean and he pastors what is called the largest and fastest growing church in the world. The numbers that showed up on the internet this afternoon were one million members of his church. You have to understand the biggest thing in everything is in Korea. The biggest slab of concrete in one block is in Korea. The biggest Presbyterian Church in the world is in Korea. The largest congregation of any kind is this one in Korea, but Yonggi Cho's church meets in eight different locations. They don't all cram into one building at one time.

Here is the point. His church started in a small army tent with just a couple of dozen people, but the plan was to get people together. So the banker shared the Gospel with the bankers. The taxi driver shared the Gospel with taxi drivers. Secretaries shared with secretaries, housewives shared with housewives. The

commonality and the connective point was used in this congregation to evangelize the people of South Korea and to draw them and bring them into the fellowship of the body of Christ – identity sought.

I know it's dangerous to make bold, pointed statements but hear this. Every one of you can find somebody in this city with which you have an identity. I know one thing is for sure. Everybody in the greater Birmingham area is male or female and I think that identifies with you. There is a way and there is a connection at some level at some point for all of us with people in this community that enables us to understand, to draw near, to encourage and to share Jesus. Paul, because he moved to a lot of places, dealt with a lot of people but he was determined to find something with all of them that brought them together that he might share Christ. You have a responsibility. You should seek for an identity that you might share the Gospel.

In I Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul goes on to explain that the goal of this process is that it becomes a way of life for us. Witnessing for the cause of Christ, sharing the Gospel with people is not something that happens every now and then. It becomes in a positive way routine. It's the anticipated thing that will happen every day. It's just the way we live. Paul says there is a disciplined life that must be practiced. Unfortunately we develop a way of life where we shoot at nothing and hit it consistently and sadly we become proud of our aim. It's just not happening.

I'm not sure how many of you remember the name Jerry Stovall but you will after this message. He played football for the St. Louis Cardinals. He played fourteen years and was all pro several times. Jerry knew and understood to be an outstanding athlete there was practice and discipline required. He kept himself in shape so that he could play at his peak and best. Jerry ran twelve miles a day for fourteen years and never missed a day just to play football. Oh that we could develop that kind of discipline in our life where we understood the significance and necessity of sharing the Gospel with lost people around us who have no hope apart from Jesus Christ.

I wasn't as always as big as I am now. When I was in high school I weighed 135 pounds and I was five foot six. The amazing thing about me was I played basketball. Things have changed significantly in the last fifty years. We were playing one night and there was a young man on the opposing team who you've probably never heard of, but his name was Freddie McCracken. He was the best high school basketball player that had ever played in the state of Virginia. I enjoyed watching him play although he and his team were not just winning the game or beating us. It was more like a pouncing. We just watched them play. He was one of those unusual guys for my period of time because he stood six foot nine. I drew my lot a couple of times to guard him. He dribbled the ball most of the time off of my head. It made no sense.

During the course of the game a foul had been committed and we were standing at the foul line. I sensed the Spirit of God say to me "You ought to witness to Freddie." I can remember thinking "Lord, we are playing basketball." The foul shot was taken and we went down to the other end of the court. Freddie scored another basket and we came back with the ball and something happened where someone was fouled again. We were back on the foul line again and God said to me "Well, here we are again. You ought to share the Gospel with Freddie." So I took a deep breath and I leaned over to him as we were standing there on the line and I said "Freddie have you reached the point in your life where if you died tonight, you know you would go to heaven?" He said "Say what?" I said, "Freddie, God loves you and Jesus died for you." The foul shot was taken and we went down to the other end of the court, except Freddie stayed at the foul line trying to figure out what was happening.

The game went on and we ended up at the foul line a couple of more times and we spoke to each other more and more about that. My basketball coach was one of those guys that didn't like to lose and so on the way back to the high school auditorium that night he thought we needed to practice Saturday morning. So we were instructed to be at the gymnasium at 6am so that we could practice. It may have been because we lost by about 60 points. We gathered in the gym at 6am and we began running. I think we ran about 25 to 30 laps around the gym and he finally called us to sit down on the floor because he needed to talk to us. He said "You guys got beat pretty badly last night and that's not going to ever happen again but I need for you to know that after the ball game was over the guys on the other team went out to get something to eat to celebrate. On the way home there was an automobile accident and Freddie McCracken was killed." I can remember sitting there on the floor wondering why I had argued with God about sharing the Gospel with someone God knew needed to hear it.

There is a good possibility you will meet people tonight, tomorrow or before this week is over who needs for you to share Jesus with them. You have a responsibility to do something. Look for that way in which you can connect with them to be able to bring the Gospel to bear. You'll find it to be such a joy and an excitement. It's the second most satisfying thing in the world and it will become a disciplined practice in your life. That's what it means to have a heart of an evangelist. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we confess that all too often we're so excited about our own salvation that we don't pay all that much attention to the other people around us. We are so excited that our sins are forgiven and we're going to a place called heaven, because we become so self-centered even as believers. Forgive us O God. Renew a right spirit within us. Holy Spirit, come to each of us in a way that keeps us sensitive to the people around us, the things we hear, the things we see and open that way that we can introduce Jesus. Lord, we are thankful for the

life that is ours because of Christ but we are also very much aware that then we become instruments that You use. You said that You would make us to be fishers of men, not that You would give us the option if we chose to take it. Forgive my sin. Encourage and empower me that this week will be lived differently because of Jesus and it's in His Name we pray, Amen.

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