

October 12, 2008

“Satan’s Secret”

I got a lot of comments about last week’s sermon. Evidently the story of the firefighter who, paralyzed with fear, stayed on the truck and let the family die in their house fire got peoples attention. I think everybody agreed that firefighter deserved serious punishment or discipline. But when we realized it was a parable for ourselves, and our own failure as Christians to take our training and save the eternal lives of those who are lost and bound for hell, it cut to our hearts. It also shows us another inadequacy that most of us have and that is, we don’t know how to share our faith. The ground has been set we must be forever firefighters. Today, we begin a journey, a journey that will look at how we can do that.

The first thing that we need to realize is that we have been wrong. By that I mean that for the most part, the Christian Church has been going about evangelism in a totally wrong way for the last hundred years. Evangelism now a days goes by a variety of names. Usually it comes up in the form of three: lifestyle evangelism, relationship evangelism, or friendship evangelism. They all work the same way. You live a good Christian life and build a relationship with people becoming their friends. Then when your friends see your good works or your superior attitude and ask you about it, you tell them about Christ. You tell them that God loves them, He wants to prosper them and that if they will just ask Him in to their heart, He will bless them. It sounds good, but there are a couple of problems with this train of thought. The first problem I will address with a question. How many times have you actually had your friend ask you why you were so happy? Or had such a great attitude, or did such a wonderful thing? Now be honest. Are you having a hard time counting all those instances? Or maybe, you can’t actually think of one of those instances. Reality is, it hardly ever happens. It does sound like a good way, but it really is an excuse for not witnessing. I’ll address the second problem also with a question. What happens if the person doesn’t feel blessed, isn’t happier or runs into some challenging times? If God is supposed to prosper them, and this is why they believed, why should they believe, if they don’t feel prosperous, if they’ve run into hard times? The third problem revolves around the basic message. Jesus Loves You! Now, I know that’s a truth, that’s a truth claim of the Bible, but if you just simply say to someone, “You know you need to know Jesus loves you,” you may

get back a wonderful response; something like, so does my mom, or so does my wife, or so does my grandparents. There is something missing when we just simply say, Jesus loves you. And finally, this method just isn't scriptural. Jesus certainly didn't witness that way neither did Paul. Paul didn't wait for people to come to him. Instead, he went to them. After all, isn't the great commission, "Go and make disciples" not, "wait for potential disciples to come to you?"

I have to be honest, I think Satan cheers every time he hears a Christian say "I just try to live a good life, so that others see I'm a Christian and that's how I witness." What Satan doesn't want you to know, is that God has given us the ultimate tool for evangelism. And that tool is called the Law or the Ten Commandments. The Bible tells us in Romans 2, verse 15, "The work of the Law is written on their hearts while their conscience also bears witness." From what I understand, there is a code among even inmates in prison. They don't accept certain criminals such as pedophiles because, well that's "just wrong." How do they know that child abuse is "just wrong"? Well Romans 2, 15 tells us why. God's law is written on their hearts. In Romans 3, verse 20 we see "Through the law we become conscience of sin." Why is this so important? Well because when we become conscience of our sin, we suddenly realize that; well to quote Romans 3: 23; "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." If we realize that we fall short of His glory. We also realize that we can't honestly expect to live with Him in heaven. It is the Law that shows us our sin. And it is the Law that shows us the need for a savior. This is how Jesus worked. I mentioned it last week, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5. It begins with the beatitudes, but then Jesus redefines the Law for the Pharisees in Matthew 5, 21-37. You see the Pharisees had become so sure of themselves in their righteousness that they felt God couldn't help but take them to heaven. They were the chosen ones; they had lived the Law so well. What did Jesus do? He pointed them right back to that Law and He redefined it for them, He gave them the true spirit of the Law. He said you have heard it said, do not murder, and Jesus says, but I tell you if you hate your brother, you have committed murder. He says, you have heard it said, do not commit adultery, yet Jesus said if you even look at someone with lust, you have committed adultery in your heart. He even went to, if you swear, or if you say something like so help me God, or honest to God, you've blasphemed because you are not to take the name of the Lord your God in vain, in fact that's where Jesus says, let your yes be yes and your no be no. He tells them, if you've gotten a divorce, you've

broken a covenant of God. You see, Jesus knew what the Pharisees needed to hear. They needed to hear that they were sinners. And they needed to hear and to see why they needed a savior. Think back to that third problem. The Jesus loves you problem and the response, so does my mom. When a person sees that they have sinned, that they fall short of God's glory, that they deserve eternal condemnation under the Law, suddenly God's love means something. It is easy to love a good person. But it's hard to love a criminal. But that's exactly what God has done for us. In His book, we have offended Him. We have sinned against Him every time we break a commandment. In fact John tells us, if you commit one sin, if you break one commandment, you've broken them all.

So here we are convicted criminals, we've all sinned. Yet God, Almighty God, He who we have sinned against; as King David said, against you and you alone oh Lord have I sinned; we have sinned against Him, and yet He gave of Himself, His only begotten son to pay the price of our sin. His son died for us and took our penalty to that cross with Him. I'd like you to really think about how important it is to understand that.

If you were driving and you were going someplace to meet some friends, and when you arrived another one of your friends came up behind you and said, whoa, man you're really lucky! On your way here, I don't know if you noticed it, but a police officer pulled up behind you and he hit his lights and he was trying to get you to pull over. When you stopped at the stop sign, he was getting out to come and get you! But some guy pulled up to him and talked to him and evidently talked him out of it. Ah man you're so lucky! And you know you would probably look at that and go, Uh, That's great. Somebody's looking out. It must have been one of my friends looking out for me, ok cool. And you will probably go about what ever you are doing and not think twice about it. On the other hand, if you were pulled over and you did receive the ticket, and then you were standing there in front of the judge; and the judge says, "So I see that you driving past a school for the blind that is marked 10 miles per hour and you were doing 45. We have you on radar we clocked you. Its posted \$25,000.00 minimum fine." If you found yourself in that courtroom and you found yourself facing that massive fine and you knew they had you dead to rights and then someone walked up and said, "Your Honor, I'd like to pay that penalty for them. Here is a check for \$25,000.00. I'm sure it won't happen again." I think your going to be more appreciative of that message than the message of hey someone prevented you from getting that ticket because

they cared about you. Because now suddenly that ticket has worth, that ticket has meaning. You know it was worth \$25,000.00.

Think about a parachute, and I'm not talking about the Golden Parachutes on Wall Street. If you got on to an airplane and they handed you a parachute, chances are you really wouldn't put it on. You wouldn't see a great need for it. In fact, if you put it on, you would be very uncomfortable; have that thing bulging in your back. But if you experienced problems on that plane and the plane started going down, I bet you'd love that parachute because a parachute even though it was uncomfortable for you, at that time would be the thing that gave you salvation. So it is with the Law. It's not fun, but the first step in evangelism is to bring out the Law. Bring the commandments to the person, point out they do fall short, they need a savior.

Charles Spurgeon writes and says, "I do not believe that any man can preach the Gospel who does not preach the Law. The Law is the needle and you can't draw the silken thread of the Gospel through a mans heart unless you first send the needle of the Law to make way for it." Or, in his book, *Holiness*, JC Ryle wrote, "Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments and show the length and breadth and depth and height of their requirement, this is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than to follow His plan."

I know it is contrary to modern thought, where we are always told build up a persons self esteem, make them feel better but a person feeling good and walking on the path to hell is headed for destruction. We need to bring that Law to them. It may be uncomfortable, but it also may be the thing that saves their life. Now when you think about this, you may say, "Boy Matt, this makes it even harder to share the word, I know even less. I know what I need to do, but how do you do it without being so offensive? How do you do it without really hurting a person? Next week, we'll talk about it. Because it's at that moment when we start to look and we start to say I'm weak, I don't think I can do it. It's at that moment that actually we become the greatest evangelist of all.

In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

