
Church Evangelism

the why, how, & where of Clearcreek chapel outreach

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Introduction Presented for the next three weeks is a series on church evangelism. This series is written and delivered to provide an introduction/reminder to a basic course at Clearcreek Chapel called *Becoming Commissioned as a Church*. This elective course sets out to teach an all-church outreach strategy taken from 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 and applied to the 10 Flocks of Clearcreek Chapel. We have taught this model to each of our flocks over the past three years.

To begin tonight, take a look at the model on the screen called *Becoming Commissioned as a Church*. As you explore the picture with your eyes allow me to cast the vision of this picture for your ears by answering the question: What is the *Becoming Commissioned* all about?

It's about a church . . . a church that is becoming missional. One knows this church is becoming missional because it is a church a prayer – a scripture-believing, Spirit-enabling, Son-glorifying kind of prayer. It is a church that knows it is on mission together. It is church that has been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ who came to Earth and went to the cross and was raised from the dead to redeem them of their sins and recreate them in the likeness of himself. And as a redeemed community they are commissioned by Christ to carry the good news of great joy into the lives of others. It is a church that knows what they are sent out to do. They together are making disciple-making disciples through baptizing and teaching those to whom the Lord gives eternal life.

The members of this church have set out on this road together. It is a road taking them into the most significant work in the world. It is a road of joy. It is a road of sorrow. It is filled with risk and reward; danger and delight. It would not be a chosen road if the Lord of glory had not chosen it for this church. This road takes the church into a mess worth making. This church finds people on this road who are bewildered and broken under the weight of their unbelief. Some of these people scorn this church for their belief. Some hate them for their attempt to help them. Others consider their unusual lifestyle and love as intriguing. They reflect upon their doctrine. They are curious and come closer to this community. And still some go "all the way".

They believe the gospel. They are baptized. They become members of this church. They love to gather together to listen to the bible preached. They grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. They love the community of believers; for they too are one. They begin to give more of their lives to each other because they have become convinced that they also are becoming Missional. They learn about being a disciple. They learn about helping others to do the same. They speak differently. They serve joyfully. They are trained in greater responsibilities. They long to multiply their life and love and labor for Jesus as they share the gospel with others. They are a part of a buoyant and sprawling Flock that desires to see even more churches carry out this same mission.

What is the *Becoming Missional* model all about? This, my brothers and sisters, is what it is all about.

Participating whole-heartedly in this vision of the Christian life will require us to trust Jesus who said , “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” (Mk.2:17). Let’s pray to this end and then begin our 3-part series. <pray>

Church Evangelism: why, how, & where of chapel outreach

This message is packaged in a 3-part series given over the next three weeks. We will pay careful attention to one paragraph in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (10:31-11:1) and use the gleaned insights to build structure for Clearcreek Chapel’s outreach ministry. This structure will be assembled over the next three weeks by introducing one part of the structure each week. Each part/message aims at answering one pertinent question relating to church evangelism. The parts to the structure of *Church Evangelism* are: 1) Its Leader 2) Its Lifestyle 3) Its Location.

The first part answers the question “why are we expected to do this”? Here, we will see Paul’s understanding of the Church’s mission. Did the Apostle Paul expect Christian congregations to evangelize?¹ If so, on what basis does he have this expectation? These types of questions will be answered tonight.

The second part to the structure for our outreach ministry answers the question “how are we expected to do this?” If it is demonstrated that we all are participants in evangelism, then the question centers on how we are to fulfill this expectation. What will this look like at the Chapel? Is there a certain lifestyle or pattern that will reflect a growing obedience in this mission? This cluster of questions will be addressed next week.

And the final part to building a structure needed to sustain our outreach ministry answers the question “Where are we expected to do this”? Is it on the streets? Does it come from relationships? Am I to hand out pamphlets or stand on a soapbox and proclaim the gospel? Where will we find opportunities in order to carry out our congregational evangelism? This question is saved for the third and final week.

Answers to these types of questions, I believe, will assist us in continuing to develop as a commissioned church; a church sent by God to show people what the gospel does and tell people what the gospel is.

The main assertion for tonight is:

- *The church is to be involved in missionary work – showing what the gospel does and telling what the gospel is.*
- Or, another way of stating the thesis might be this: *The whole church is to become all things to all people that by all means the church might save some.*
- Or, *the Church is on mission imitating her Savior Jesus Christ.*

¹This way of asking the question comes from the title of a biblical monograph written by Robert Plummer. The current 3-part series has been deeply influenced by him and his good work *Paul’s Understanding of the Church’s Mission: Did the Apostle Paul Expect the Early Christian Communities to Evangelize?* Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006).

- But perhaps the simplest way of stating the big idea tonight is: ***Clearcreek Chapel is expected to evangelize the lost.***

My task tonight is singular. It is to show you why this is so. The doctrine cannot come from me. It must be shown as coming from God. Otherwise, this message rings hollow and simply is not true. So the proof to the claim is found in our summary paragraph tonight - 1Corinthians 10:31-11:1.

Open your bibles with me to 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 and listen for church evangelism – the why, how and where of chapel outreach strategy.

Its Leader (answers the “why”)

10:31-11:1

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.***

This small paragraph functions as a conclusion to Paul’s teaching on disagreements over eating idol meat. In fact, according to one commentator “the entire treatment of idol food (8:1-11:1) should be read in the light of this closing call for imitation”.²

Why should we be involved in evangelism as a church? Who is the leader of such a command?

The apostle Paul

Chapter 11:1 says, be imitators of me. We are to follow the apostle Paul in this vision of the Christian life. We are to copy something of his lifestyle. But what does imitating the apostle actually mean? What are we to imitate? The context of this command will tell us.

In these three chapters, 8-10, the issue appears to be that certain members of the church found it simply fine to eat meat sacrificed to idols. They put forward their right to do so based on certain truths Paul taught them (8:1-9). They enjoyed non-religious social gatherings that were commonly held at Corinth’s pagan temples (8:10-11).

However, there were other members within the same church who believed differently. They did not have this type of freedom to dine in a pagan temple with their friends. They were still weak in their conscience having come out of pagan practices as an unbeliever (8:7). Their faith was not strong enough to be with unbelievers. They were unable to eat and drink with them in a place they used to participate in idolatry. Thus, if they went to social parties and celebrations and partook of what was served they believed that they were sinning. And if they continued to participate in idolatry they would eventually be destroyed (8:11-13).

Even though the apostle agreed with the “strong” group’s assessment that food sacrificed to idols had no spiritual importance, Paul states a principle in 8:13 that self-denial for the cause of loving others is the way of the Christian life.

²Richard Hays, *First Corinthians*, 179.

In chapter 9, Paul then puts himself out explicitly as an example of this principle: To deny self and take up a costly lifestyle to serve others for their benefit which is their salvation. (9:1-27). But he wants them to be aware that there is danger in this ministry. He concludes his teaching on idol meat by taking up the topic of faithfulness to God in the midst of living in a world populated with idols. There are dangers in living in this world. Idolatry is real. It is devastating and attracts the wrath of God. Paul shifts his attention from using Christian liberty in non-religious gatherings and denounces idolatry altogether as unfaithful (10:1-22). He resumes his basic teaching in 10:23-30 that Christians have freedom to eat and drink anything so long as it is for God's glory and the good of others.

So, Paul is teaching the church in 8:1-10:30 that Christians do have freedom in Christ. They are to enjoy God's good gifts for what they are and to do so with unbelievers. This association with unbelievers over meals and doing life together can be an occasion for sharing the gospel for the sake of their salvation. But he also is teaching the church that this lifestyle is dangerous and needs humility and wisdom. He wants the church to connect with idolaters³ while fleeing from idolatry.⁴

This lengthy argument running from 8:1-10:30 comes to a conclusion in our paragraph for this series-10:31-11:1. In this short paragraph, Paul summarizes the last 3 chapters and ends by instructing his converts to imitate him. But up to this point we have not specifically defined what we are to imitate. In what sense does Paul require the church to imitate him? Are all single Christians to remain unmarried and leave their livelihoods to go across Asia Minor to preach the gospel and plant churches? Are his churches to lay hands on the sick to heal, purge the demonized, to write scripture and bring people out from the dead? In what way is the church to imitate the apostle Paul? We have stated that in knowing the context of this paragraph we will know clearly what we are to imitate.

In chapters 8-9, Paul lays out a certain lifestyle to be understood as a pattern for all believers. Paul set out to accommodate and adjust his lifestyle to connect with unbelievers – both in denying himself where need be and in permitting himself where need be – as he sought the good of unbelievers; namely their salvation. The church has a responsibility to deny itself anything so long as it is for God's glory and the good of others. And the church has freedom to permit itself anything so long as it is for God's glory and the good of others. The principle behind this teaching is: ***Christians have liberty in morally neutral matters – they can partake or they can abstain. The motive behind this principle is the salvation of as many people as possible.***

This is 1 Corinthians 8-10. This is the context in which we hear our paragraph for this series. This is the framework for understanding the command “be imitators of me”⁵ says Paul.

Jesus Christ

With this amount of evidence pointing to the case that all members of Clearcreek Chapel are to be involved in evangelism it should be enough. But Paul does not stop with himself. He goes on to say, be imitators of me in my lifestyle evangelism “...as I am of Christ”. We now we come to

³5:9-10

⁴10:14

⁵To fortify the teaching of *Church Evangelism* (i.e. every member participation in evangelism) as witnessed in 1 Corinthians, see 4:15-17 and 16:10 and how Paul relates his teaching to the entire church in 15:58.

the ultimate leader in Church evangelism; the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul tells the church to follow him in lifestyle evangelism as he follows the person and pattern of Jesus⁶ who

... came eating and drinking, and they [his critics] said, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." (emphasis mine) *(Luke 7:35 ESV)*

In this passage we find our Lord and Savior Jesus associating with sinners. He would go to where they hung out. He would eat with them and drink with them while sharing all who he is to them. He is the gospel. Jesus brought himself into places void of the gospel. He showed people his love. He told them the truth. He won people over to himself by giving them himself.

Luke 7:35 comes just before a scene in which Jesus eats and drinks with sinners. In this scene, we notice some criticizing him. And we notice a broken, lonely sinner who was forgiven by him. And she showed her extravagant love for him in public without worry over what people thought.

Jesus said of people like this: She loves much because she is forgiven much.

To be wholeheartedly participating in church evangelism, we are to follow our leader who is Jesus Christ. To follow Jesus in this way requires following him as a lover and not merely as a learner. As we follow him as a lover we will go where he goes.⁷ And part of the sacrifice for following him where he goes is that we will be criticized. But it won't matter anymore. He has changed our hearts. He has changed our loves. We now care more about winning sinners over to Christ than we do about our own reputations.

This, as we notice tonight, is the first step in becoming Commissioned as a Church. This is the first step into church evangelism.

Conclusion

Church evangelism, in conclusion, starts with recognizing that there is no option. The choice is between following Christ in obedience or settling for disobedience. There is no choice but one. We can see that evangelism is not just for the Paul-like, Timothy-like, and Titus-like kind of people. It is not just for those who have the gift of evangelism or are church planters or are elders. It is for all of us. For the common, ordinary, run of the mill Christians who desire to follow Christ into new uncharted areas. Followers of Christ as lovers of Christ are friends of sinners. This mission requires heart-change. It also requires explanation over how we are expected to carry out this mission. And it is to this topic to which we turn our attention next week.

⁶The best way of understanding Paul's connection between Jesus' life and mission and the church's life and mission would be to read the four gospels slowly and prayerfully. Here is just one theme running through one of the gospels that may assist the reader in formulating his/her convictions. Notice: 1. Jesus was sent on mission (Luke 4:16-30; Isaiah 61:1-2). 2. Jesus sent 12 men on this mission (Luke 6:12-15; 9:1-2) and then 72 men on the same mission (Luke 10:1-11). 3. Jesus now sends his church to carry out his patent mission (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8).

⁷Revelation 14:4

But for now, my hope in releasing this series is simply that it will make us want to live. Not a tedious breathing in and out, in and out... but a living in his kingdom as it should be. Our ideas about relationship with Jesus will expand – the life-changing, lifestyle-making sweet union with Christ as we live in the world and yet are not of the world and yet are for the world. Let's dream together of our tomorrow's mission. Let us learn how to repent so that the dreams will turn into realities. Let us encourage one another in the painful; yet promising ventures in front of us. Let us do all this for the Glory of God and the good of unbelievers.

Tonight, let's end the way we started tonight. (BC model slide on screen). What does becoming Commissioned look like? Picture once again with me this vision of kingdom living so that our desires dilate for his will and our love leads us in his ways. What is Becoming Commissioned all about? Well . . .

It's about a church . . . a church that is becoming commissioned. We know this church is becoming commissioned because we are a church a prayer – a scripture-believing, Spirit-enabling, Son-glorifying kind of prayer. We are a church that knows we are on mission together. We are a church that has been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ who came to Earth and went to the cross and was raised from the dead to redeem us of our sins and recreate us in the likeness of himself. And as a redeemed community we are commissioned by Christ to carry the good news of great joy into the lives of others. We are a church that knows what we are sent out to do. We together are making disciple-making disciples through baptizing and teaching those to whom the Lord gives eternal life.

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What is Becoming Commissioned all about? This, my brothers and sisters, is what it is all about. Follow Jesus as a lover into this vision. Let's pray.