

Two months ago... an announcement came from the elite society... of world-class scientists in the field of **particle physics**. Declarations this dramatic... coming from this community... are **rare**. ... This proclamation... made on July 4, 2012... was so big that 1,000 scientists stood in line all night long to get into the room where the announcement would be made.

The head of the coolest new "toy" in the world of particle physics... the 10 billion dollar... Large Hadron Collider... straddling France and Switzerland... was about to give what many anticipated... would be a ground-breaking pronouncement about the discovery... of what is believed to be the Higgs boson particle. (Although one MIT scientist cautioned, "We [still] do not yet understand the nature of this new particle.") ... This subatomic particle has been **theorized** for over fifty years but has never been seen... never measured... never proven. ... It's so fundamental in shaping the universe that some scientists have called it the "God particle."

An article in The New York Times about the Higgs boson announcement had this to say:

Confirmation of the Higgs boson or something very much like it would constitute a rendezvous with destiny for a generation of physicists who have *believed* in the boson for half a century *without ever seeing it*.

Now... isn't that interesting...!? ... These empirical scientists... have believed in something they could **not** see... and previously had been **unable** to prove! ... They have believed in this unproven particle...

because - what they could see - had convinced them that it had to be there.

Now... what exactly was the empirical science community's problem with believing in God...? ...

On the other hand... Christians believe in the unseen God... Whom we cannot empirically prove exists. ... We know that He exists because what we can see reveals His power and divine nature. We observe the meticulous order of the universe ... and know that an intelligent designer had to have created it. From these sub-atomic particles... to the vast galaxies (of which there are millions) – intelligent design is everywhere.

It is not irrational to believe in God. ... On the contrary... nothing could be more rational.

Being rational... scientific... or empirical... does not prevent a person from being able to believe in something they cannot see or prove by scientific method. The only thing that prevents people from believing ... or enables them to believe... it would seem... ... is personal choice. ... Particle physicists chose to believe in Higgs boson. ...

But our passage last week in the Gospel of Luke... seemed to suggest that there is something else at play in this. It isn't only a matter of choice.

Remember that since the Lord came back to life... after He had been so torturously crucified in full view of His disciples... the followers of Christ had great difficulty believing in His resurrection. ... Jesus had appeared to several of them individually... and He had appeared on multiple occasions

to them in groups. And we kept seeing Him... in the passages we looked at last week challenging His disciples by asking “Why do you doubt that I am alive...?” ... They kept doubting that Jesus was actually alive.

It was not until Luke 24:45... after many appearances... where they were allowed to touch His wounds and eat meals with Him... that Jesus opened their eyes... and they finally understood. ... Interesting! – Please notice that all of their empirical proof... the only evidence science says is necessary... was **not enough!** ... God had to open their eyes!

And God has to open yours and my eyes... before we will ever understand Scripture... and believe the truth that it contains. ... Unbelievers can learn facts about the Bible... They may even be able to quote entire passages from the Bible... But it is only when God opens the eyes of an individual... that they are able to comprehend... or understand it.

The author of Hebrews refers to Jesus as the “founder”... or as other versions translate it... “author of our faith”

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He **starts** it in us... **AND**... He **develops** it in us. ... Without Jesus lifting the veil of unbelief in us... apart from His opening our minds... without His authoring faith in us – you and I **would have no faith.**

So... Jesus finally opens the eyes of His disciples... as we saw in last week's passage. ... He didn't do this immediately for them... it took a while. But once He opened their eyes... immediately He showed them... that with such an understanding... comes great responsibility. ... It is right here in our text... we can't miss it.

We might want to concentrate on this wonderful event of finally having the disciple's eyes opened... and then jump down to Jesus' ascension... where He rose up in the clouds and returned to heaven... but we dare NOT miss what comes in between. Jesus clearly announced – what everyone who is made to understand... is to **do**.

This is where we begin today. Has the Lord opened your eyes? Has He allowed you to understand that ... although He died a horrible death... He came back to life after three days... doing exactly what He said He would do... before He actually died...? ... Then please give your prayer-filled attention to our passage this morning.

Luke 24:45-49

Privilege always brings responsibility! ... They were to be witnesses of all that He had said and done... A witness is somebody who sincerely tells what he has seen and heard ... We are witnesses who point to Jesus Christ and tell lost sinners how to be saved.

But let's be very clear about what this passage is presenting to us here... Witnessing is not something that we do for the Lord... it is something that He does through us... as we are empowered by Him... as He fills us with the Holy Spirit.

As most of you know... I teach public speaking at the local community college in Bend. ... I save the toughest speaking assignment for the student's last speaking opportunity. In the final week of classes... the students are expected to give a 5-7 minute speech that is designed to persuade the other students of something... and then motivate them to take some kind of action. ... Let me tell you... giving a speech to motivate is the most difficult speech there is. ... Now we take our time in getting there... and all term long I am giving the students strategies of persuasive argument. ... Some of these techniques have been around longer than 300 hundreded years before Christ... Aristotle the Greek philosopher had done some strong thinking in this area... and over the centuries since then... more and more strategies for persuasive argumentation have been mapped out... and put forth. There are some effective tools and principles that can increase a person's persuasive ability.

But let me tell you something. Whenever I witness... or talk to someone... who is not a believer... about Christ... the last thing I want to rely on... are those techniques that I teach in my college courses. (Now... trying to convince Patti that we need to have ice cream in the house... is a different matter!) ... But... whenever I get up here to preach... I am not relying on the rhetoricians principles of persuasive argument...

There is a great difference between a "sales talk"... or a persuasive public speech... and a Spirit-empowered witness. ... Vance Havner had it exactly right when he said - "*People do not come to Christ at the end of an argument.*"

Scripture teaches... and numerous examples are given for us to see... that it is a Spirit empowered witness... that God uses to persuade on spiritual matters. "Simon Peter came to Jesus because Andrew went after him with a testimony." We go forth in the authority of His name, in the power of His spirit, heralding His Gospel of His grace.

Save the principles of rhetoric and persuasive argumentation for other things. ... Ladies... just don't come up to me after the service and ask me for some tips on how to convince your husband to take you to Hawaii on your next vacation...

But looking back now at this newly convinced group of followers... Jesus' rag-tag group of disciples... they did not seem very likely to persuade anyone else to join their following... did they? ... They were hiding behind locked doors... for fear of the Jews... when Jesus suddenly appeared to them in the upper room.

But once they got going... proclaiming the truth of Jesus' resurrection... repentance and forgiveness... Acts chapter four... verse 13... says crowds marveled because they were uneducated... but they were persuading thousands to follow Christ. They had no idea what Aristotle taught about ethos... pathos... and logos... ... They simply spoke by the very same power God gives to everyone whose eyes He opens to the truths of His Word. ...Has He opened your eyes...?

Luke 24:47 – "...repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations..."

Repentance needs to be proclaimed.

Ever since I was a young boy... I have had a particular problem with the word “repent” or “repentance.” You see my family would often drive over to the California coast for the day... or to vacation for a few days. ...On the winding mountain road of highway 40... there would be a massive granite rock confronting every driver before the road took a sharp turn. And painted in big black letters against a painted white background... someone had graffitied the word “REPENT.” That is all it said... “Repent!” ... Long before I could read... or even knew what the word meant... I was confronted with the message someone had littered the landscape with. Then once I came to know what it meant to repent... I still resented that painted message... because I knew it only angered non-Christians who passed by... because it said nothing about the need or reason to repent. That graffitied word... I thought was doing more harm... than any good. “How does one repent?” Why should we repent?” – It didn’t say. The obnoxious message simply said “repent!” I know that my dad... who is not yet a believer... would show his signs of disapproval. He would sometimes grumble... or grunt his displeasure.

But the word doesn’t need to be obnoxiously painted on a roadside... in order for it to be offensive. ... The entire concept that a person must repent... in order to come to Christ... is itself very offensive. If it is not invasive... if it is not provocative... if it is not an assault on our nature... than it is not being properly understood.

Yes... God asks us to offend people! (And some of you may be saying ... “I can see now... why you became a pastor!”)

When we tell someone that they need to repent... we are not asking them to change some of their thinking. "Give Jesus a try..." is not the same thing as calling someone to repent.

Listen... calling someone to repent means – have them acknowledge that the road they are traveling on is the wrong road. Put your life on an entirely new course... (Maybe that is what the graffiti painter wanted to communicate... Turn around... don't go to the California coast... Move to Oregon!...) Then again... perhaps not!

But to a self-sufficient person who wants to think they can do things on their own... this is a message that says... "No... you can't! You can only foul it up... You need to get off this road... in fact... get completely out of the driver's seat... change... and change drastically!" ... See... this is completely different than "Add Jesus to your life... Keep going... just add Jesus for some more fun and excitement..." ... If there has been no radical life change – there has been no repentance! ... Radical life change... otherwise known as "repentance" is front and center to salvation. ... If Christ has not brought about a radical change in your life... then please determine right away... whether or not you have been saved!

The message to repent offends... because it calls for change... radical change. ... Many who think they don't need to change... that they are just fine-thak-you-very-much... find this essential part of the Gospel to be offensive.

Jesus told them to proclaim repentance and forgiveness. The Gospel is about repentance and forgiveness. ... Now... I am sure that you know...

that as believers... we need forgiveness everyday... because we sin everyday – and guess what. ... We also need to repent every day. We need to continue to make radical change in our lives! ... Christian... the Gospel is not just something that you use once and then you are done with it... except for telling it to others... ... No! The Gospel is for you and I to use every single day of our Christian life... It calls for you and I to repent every day... make radical God-led change in our lives... and seek His forgiveness for the sins we commit every day.

This may seem offensive to us... and to those we proclaim this to... but look! God promised to provide us with power.

Luke 24:49

When Luke continues... he goes on to write the Book of Acts. It is his volume 2 to the Gospel we have been studying for the past three years... and are concluding today. ... But in the second chapter of Acts... Luke shows that ... on the Day of Pentecost... the Holy Spirit did come upon the church and empowered them to preach the Word. ... And this **same** Holy Spirit... in **no less** of a measure... is poured out on every believer...

Titus 3:5-6 (ESV)

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

It is not just the “Super-Saint” who has this empowering. ... Each and every believer... in the process of their being saved... has the Holy Spirit **richly** poured out on them. ... There isn’t a single born-again Christian in

this entire room... who does not have the Holy Spirit richly poured out upon them. ... If you are a believer... if God has opened your eyes and authored a faith inside of you... **you** have this same power.

Verse 47 again - "...repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name **to all nations**..."

Now let me talk about this matter of it being proclaimed to all nations for a few minutes...

Let's just be real honest here... ... Those who are blessed – do not seem to be terribly eager to share those blessings... do they...? Even though the point of the parable Jesus told His disciples in Luke 12:48 was clear to them and is clear to us... (Luke 12:48 says... in part... "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required...") ... We remain reluctant to share this... greatest of all possible blessings... with others. ...

Down through the Centuries of Christian History... this foot-dragging is evidenced in every generation. (It is not just you and I...) But we need to take a look at some serious lessons... threaded all the way through the Church's history... since Jesus gave us this commission to take the Gospel to all nations... What we notice is over 2000 years of Christians not giving their voluntary obedience... but God... nevertheless... accomplishing His will... through often devastating and involuntary means.

It starts very close to the time Jesus gave this commission. The Gospel was to go to all the nations... starting in Jerusalem. ... That first generation took the Gospel to Jerusalem... but they were not terribly eager to share it beyond that city. By the time we get to Acts chapter 7... Luke writes about

a tremendous persecution against Christians that breaks out. Saul goes on a rampage of dragging Christians to their death. ... Torment was so severe.. only a few Christians could remain in the city and not flee. The Christians scattered all over the Roman Empire. ... They could no longer buy or sell anything in Jerusalem. If they wanted to eat... or support their families in any way... they had to move away. ... And as they went to other cities... they took the Gospel with them.

God said “Go”... they wanted to stay... It was as if the Church at Jerusalem was content to just keep the Gospel in their city. There was no known effort to spread it. ... But God... nevertheless... accomplished His will through an involuntary means. ... It took the Christians all the way until Acts chapter 15 to get the message that God wanted them to go all over the Roman Empire with the Gospel. ... That is what the Book of Acts... this second volume of the story that Luke wrote is all about. It shows how the Gospel reached Rome and spread through the Empire.

It took about 400 years for the Gospel to spread around the Empire and then become dominant. The church developed... organized... and became the normal way of life throughout the Roman Empire. Once Roman Emperor... Constantine... accepted Christianity... Roman persecution of Christians stopped and Christianity settled in. ... But that was not all nations! ... For the most part (of course there were some exceptions) but Christians were not interested in taking the Gospel to their neighbors. Their neighbors were rude and uncivilized – barbarians in the worst sense of the term! Christians of the Roman Empire (as many Believers today) were only **rarely** willing to take practical steps to fulfill the commission that Christ has given us.

The now – Christianized Roman Empire... was subject to the raids of the barbarians from the North. Rome began having difficulty defending itself against marauding... pillaging... and plundering bands of Goths... Ostrogoths... Visigoths... Vandals... and other uncivilized tribes from what is now Germany. ... And when these barbarians came and destroyed... they took back to Germany with them... as slaves... Christians... and Bibles. They were particularly attracted to the cathedrals... because they usually contained riches of gold and silver. So many priests were captured and taken to Germany. ... Do you know what that eventually led to...? The Christianization of Germany!

You see... once gain... God's great commission told believers to "go... bring the Gospel to all the nations!" ... The Christians of the Roman Empire were content to just keep the Gospel to themselves. ... But God... nevertheless... accomplished His will... through involuntary means. The barbarians came and got it.

Over the next 400 years... the Gospel settled into Germany... and as Rome weakened... the "center of Christianity" got settled in Germany and became what History has called the "Holy Roman Empire."

The rise of a strong leader named "Charlemagne" facilitated communication and civilization of Western Europe. Charlemagne had been eager for his own kind... Germanic tribes... to be made Christian... but he did not throw his weight behind any kind of bold mission effort to fulfill the Great Commission that Christ gave to His followers. There had been advances of missionary activity to outposts in Western Europe... but

nothing to the “disgusting” neighbors to the North... those Scandinavian people.

Well... not too long after the consolidation of Western Europe... 400 years of their becoming civilized and contently keeping the Gospel to themselves... a new menace to peace and security began to raise its ugly head... the Vikings... and I am not talking about a football team from Minnesota – who wear purple!

They took special delight in burning churches... after plundering their riches... and selling monks into slavery. ... Once more... when Christians did not reach out to them... pagan people came to where the Gospel was – and the powerful phenomenon of Christianity continued to spread.

The Northmen... Normans... and the Danish landed on the shores of Great Brittan and took over huge sections of middle England. But the Gospel was too powerful. It went back to Scandinavia and spread.

The next period of Christian history would unfold with its own surprises. Now Europe and Scandinavia were Christianized. Would they have learned the lesson to take the Gospel to all the nations... or would they sink into their own self-satisfaction...?

They did... in fact... do both.

Over the next 400 years... Europeans attempted to bring the Gospel back to Palestine and re-take Jerusalem from the Muslims. ... Somehow the Gospel mission got lost in those crusades. ... Some of Europe tried to

bring the Gospel to the newly discovered America's... but this was quickly mixed with the motive to be wealthy...

The Gospel has been with us here in America a little over 400 years now. America has had a vital mission effort. ... But let me be honest. It is dying. The flame is going out for world mission. ... I have talked with numerous men and women who felt called to the mission field... but could not go... because they could not raise the support to go. If the 400 year cycle of Christian history continues... what will we now do with the Gospel...? It still needs to go out.

The Great Commission... as seen in our passage in Luke says that it needs to be brought to all the nations starting in Jerusalem ... starting with your very neighbors... starting with your community.

This Fall our church is launching an attempt to bring the Gospel to the nations... starting with our community. The type of people we are purposing to bring the Gospel to might come into our facility as a tremendous inconvenience. Some may not be all that civilized. They will have their struggles with alcohol... drugs... sex abuse... and many other addictions. ... Just like the Christians throughout our history – we might be content to leave them alone without the Gospel... *“Why bother...? They are ‘low-lives’ – certainly not as cultured as we are...”*

But just as the Gospel was powerful enough to transform whole societies – I am looking forward to seeing God do tremendous things in the lives of the individuals who are about to inconvenience us – as they come to get the Gospel...

Let's be willing participants...! Please be praying about how God might want to use you... in taking the Gospel to needy people.

In November 2010, a wedding party in Glenelg, Australia, was unexpectedly called into action right after the wedding ceremony. While they were posing for pictures on a scenic ledge, a woman unrelated to the wedding fell into the water and started drowning. Dressed in his tuxedo, the best man jumped in and brought the woman back toward shore. Then the bride, a trained nurse, waded into the water and started administering CPR. By the time the Surf Life Saving volunteers had arrived, the woman had regained consciousness. But according to one safety official, "[The victim] was very lucky that the bridal party was there and they acted quickly and got her to the shallows." After the daring rescue operation, the drenched but heroic best man and the bride happily rejoined the wedding reception and continued with the festivities.

In some ways, this unusual event serves as a great image for the calling of our church. ... We're dressed up for a party (celebrating worship), but at the same time we're also prepared to dive into mission, even when it's inconvenient and dangerous. ... Worship and mission... loving God and loving others... praising and serving — these combinations aren't opposites... they form the dual nature of our calling... for anyone... whom the Lord has opened the eyes... for them to understand the Bible.

