



September 1
Rev. Mike Jones
ONA Executive Director
Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV)

“Yet God has set eternity in the human heart. “

One of the first theological books I read was *The Knowledge of the Holy*, by AW Tozer. Arguably, the most famous quote from that book is this, “What comes into our minds when you think about God is the most important thing about you.” While that is a profound thought for us as believers to ponder, think of how that impacts those that are not yet believers.

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who said, “God created man in his own image. And man, being a gentleman, returned the favor.” If that’s true, then it’s no wonder the unconverted mind has such a skewed image of the God that we profess, worship, love and serve.

Think about it. If a person were to gather their image of their god exclusively from secular sources, what type of god do you think they would come up with? Perhaps it’s the prosperity god who only blesses and never asks for obedience or sacrifice. Or perhaps it’s the prevalent view of secular millennials and Generation Z (born after 2000) that really hasn’t given much thought to God. James Emery White calls them not atheists but “apatheists.”* *Yet God has set eternity in the human heart.* (Eccl. 3:11 NIV)

Into this confusion about the person and character of God, we are called to evangelize our friends and neighbors. Where to begin? We begin where Jesus Himself began with a man who was confused about who God was. Remember the story of Nicodemus, a teacher of the Law, came to Jesus and wanted to talk about spiritual things. And our Lord, in His gracious and gentle way, confronted this religious fellow with the truth of John 3:16. "God so loved the World..." Nicodemus' experience was probably not a God of love! As a Pharisee of that day, he would have probably experienced a God of judgement and law, but not a God of love. Yet, Jesus opened His "gospel presentation" with "whatever you may think you know about God, know this- God loves the world..." What about your friends and neighbors? What's the first thing they think of when they think about God? Go ahead and ask them. It might be a great entry to a profound gospel conversation. And then follow that up with another question. "May I tell you about the God of the Bible? He loves you so much He gave His only Son so that you can be right with Him."

*(*Meet Generation Z*, James Emery White, Baker House publishers, 2017)

September 2
Rev. Bill Cain
Louisville ARP Church
1 Corinthians 3:6,7

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."

Part I: Fearless Evangelism

Recently at Louisville ARP Church in Georgia, we have been studying and talking about evangelism. It is a natural topic right now for our church as I am enrolled in the Church Vitality program at Erskine Seminary through Outreach North America. We all know we need to be more intentional in our outreach. We talked through various barriers to doing outreach and personal evangelism. There are many such hurdles. But one kept coming up over and over in various ways. The concern came down to fear in one form or another. What if the person asks me a question that I cannot answer? What if the person rejects me? What if, what if, what if.

This passage reminds us that God is at work in evangelism. He alone plants the Living Word in someone's heart. He alone brings the fruit of evangelism. We should not be fearful when we evangelize because the success or failure is up to God. But notice the truth contained in the verse. Paul intentionally planted and Apollos intentionally watered. They did what God had commanded (Matt. 28:16-20). Yet Paul understood the truth behind the purposed work of evangelism. It is not up to us. It is all on God.

Here is where fearless evangelism comes to us. Once we realize that we do not have to “win” someone to Christ, that the Kingdom of God is not dependent on how well we speak or how bold we are in apologetics, we can relax and speak about God and his work in our own lives. This is often the most powerful evangelistic message. Freedom descends on us like a gentle rain to refresh our souls when we let God do his work, and we fulfill our God-given roles in evangelism.

September 3
Rev. Bill Cain
Louisville ARP Church
Romans 10:9

“If you confess with your mouth that that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Part II: The Simplicity of Salvation

A man in our community had been visiting our church. His life was troubled, and he was still experiencing some of the consequences of that sinful life. One of our deacons had been pouring his life into Nate to help him and to tell him about Jesus. After several months of visiting and many different conversations, I had the great joy of sharing a meal with Nate and being with him as he prayed for Jesus to save him from his sins and to come into and rule his heart.

A few days later, Nate and I were again together as we began to talk about his discipleship and how he might come to know Jesus in more meaningful ways. Nate was a baby and needed to grow in Christ. He was just beginning his path of sanctification. Nate said, “I had no idea that it would be that easy to get saved. I thought I had to accomplish something.”

His words were a wakeup call for me to continue to examine the clarity with which we talk about the Gospel. The passage above reminds us that the work of salvation by the Holy Spirit is a call for a Savior – to a relationship. Nate did not have to accomplish anything. He simply had to hold fast to two points: 1 – that he was a sinner and God punishes sin; 2 – believe that Jesus is his Savior - the only way to eternal life.

How often we try to make the Gospel complicated. Yes, there is a depth to God that we will never plumb. But the Good News does not require a seminary degree. It requires a humble and contrite heart.

September 4
Rev. Jay Crout
Village Presbyterian Church
1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT)

“But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Every day we must make countless decisions. So it is a great thing that the Lord has given us the ability to quickly and thoughtfully consider our circumstances. It doesn’t take us 30 minutes every morning to decide whether the coffee in our cabinet is worth drinking. We can make that decision in the grocery store so we don’t have to reconsider it every day.

But we learn in 1 Samuel 16:7 that this God-imaging function within all of us is broken. Our problem isn’t an inability to judge things. No, that function works well. Our problem, rather, is that we judge based on the wrong criteria. We don’t accurately see things the way God does. And for today’s devotional, we can apply this to evangelism.

We all have friends and family close to us who do not know the Lord, and one of the great challenges in the Christian life can be determining how to share the gospel with them. In a sense, it is easier to share the gospel with a total stranger. Why? Because we haven’t trained ourselves to quickly determine where our conversations with them should go yet. But with a friend or family member, there is an automatic default for our conversations. Maybe it’s work. Maybe it’s sports. Maybe it’s dating, or children, or any number of other topics. But we must see things the way God sees them. And that includes seeing the people around us as people in need of the gospel.

So today, take a moment to consider someone close to you who needs the gospel. Begin considering how your conversations with them may be stuck in a rut that actually prevents gospel conversations. As you begin to see them through God’s eyes those conversations will change. Because while people judge by outward appearances, the Lord looks at the heart!

September 5
Iain Duguid
Christ Presbyterian Church
Acts 8:34-35

“And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

The Gospel and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Part 1)

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch shows God's grace reaching a doubly-disadvantaged outsider. He was a foreigner, a black African from a faraway land. He was also a eunuch. In Deuteronomy 23:1, all eunuchs were excluded from the assembly of God's people. Only the pure, the whole, and the complete could enter the presence of the King of Kings. There was a no entry sign on the temple door for people like him.

Into that situation of darkness and despair, God sent Philip with a message of hope. Philip overheard the Ethiopian reading Isaiah 53. The Ethiopian invited him into his chariot and, starting with that passage, Philip told him about Jesus. Like the downcast disciples on the Emmaus road, the Ethiopian had his eyes opened to Jesus.

Philip told him that Jesus was the one of whom the prophet spoke. Jesus, the lamb of God, was silent before his judges, the Jewish Sanhedrin. Jesus was denied earthly justice and his life was brutally taken away. Though Jesus had no descendants physically – just like the eunuch – Isaiah 53 said he would nonetheless see his offspring. Through the gospel, his spiritual descendants would be numerous. Like the prophet and the people of his day, we have all sinned and gone astray like lost sheep and deserve to be eternally cut off. Nonetheless, out of God's grace and mercy, he has taken all of our iniquities and sins and laid them on Jesus as our substitute on the cross, so that through faith in him we might become the family of God. He was wounded for our transgressions but by his stripes, we may be healed.

September 6

Iain Duguid

Christ Presbyterian Church

Acts 8:34-35

“And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

The Gospel and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Part 2)

The eunuch needed to know that this gospel was for him too. It's all very well to say that Jesus was crucified for “our” transgressions, but does that “our” have room for the total outsider, the eunuch from Ethiopia? The answer was a few columns further on in his Isaiah scroll: “For the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose what pleases me, and hold firmly to my covenant, I will give them...a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give each of them an everlasting name that will never be cut off. As for the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to become his servants...I will bring them to my holy mountain

and let them rejoice in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (Isa. 56:4-7) There may have been a "No entry" sign over the temple in Jerusalem for the Ethiopian eunuch, but Isaiah foresaw a time when there would be an open door for him too into the people of God.

The reason that Isaiah can anticipate the open door of Isaiah 56 is precisely because he anticipates the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. It is the cutting off of the perfect one that opens the doorway to all those who are morally crippled and spiritually emasculated. The symbolic closing of access to God to those who are physically deformed is transformed to an open door of access to God for all, because our spiritual disability has been dealt with comprehensively in Christ. In Christ, there is neither Jew nor gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, whole or eunuch: all who come to God, come by faith on the same terms, with empty hands, and are made whole in Christ.

September 7
Josh Kitchen
Hope Reformed Church
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

A New Job

A few years ago I had the opportunity to attend a Fourth of July party thrown by the US Ambassador to Papua New Guinea. Unfortunately, I was passing through the capitol on my way to a very remote village, so I couldn't dress for the occasion. As I shook the ambassador's hand (he in a suit and me in my Columbia dri-fit gear) I wondered if he would even let me enter the party. Thankfully, he did let me in, and I got to party with the US Ambassador and PNG Prime Minister.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he had just written that the Church shouldn't regard anyone according to the flesh. God can make even the biggest outcast into a new creation, "who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). And then Paul gives us a new title and job description - ambassador reconciling the lost to God.

The job of an ambassador is to represent and speak for his or her sovereign. It is the job of each and every person in the body of Christ to tell the world that, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Like the US Ambassador to PNG we can't look past the underdressed, or less educated, or the social outcast.

You are called to be an ambassador for God wherever He has placed you today. Should that change your schedule? Should it shape your conversations? Pray and ask God to use you today in His service. Ask Him to give you opportunities and conversations where you can represent Him to a lost and dying world.