

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Evangelism? (Part 1)

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I. Introduction

What are you supposed to say when you evangelize? Should you tell them your personal testimony followed by an invitation to believe in Jesus? Or should you just stick with tried and true Bible passages that clearly teach someone how to go to heaven? Can you talk about Jesus' ability to save them from their problems now or should you leave that for another time after they believe in Jesus?....how did Jesus evangelize?

II. What Message Are We Supposed to Give When We Evangelize?

God's Goodnews is more than "You're not going to hell!" It is absolutely true that God doesn't want anyone to go to hell, 1 Timothy 2:4. This is one reason why God sent His Son to die for us so that we wouldn't have to suffer an eternal death, John 3:16. But this is just a small part of what Jesus came to do for us. Yes, eternal life saves us from hell (Revelation 20:15) but we should not turn eternal life into fire insurance when it's so much more.

Eternal life is a Person by the name of Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:2. Therefore, when Jesus gives us eternal life, He's giving us Himself. This is why we are said to be "in Him" or "in Christ" and it's why we're called the Body of Christ. We become part of Him. But that's not all. What Jesus is giving us is an eternal relationship with Him and His Father, John 17:3. It's a relationship that is so close that He wants to be (and is) with us 24/7, John 17:20-26 (Galatians 4:6).

Therefore, Jesus doesn't just want to save us from hell; He wants to show us who we were truly meant to be, the life we were truly meant to live (John 10:10), and thereby who God truly is. He's not an uncaring, distant God; He's a loving Father who always wants to help us succeed in life, in every aspect of it.

Are we supposed to make believers or disciples? Can't we just have a short conversation with someone and quote passages like John 6:47 and have that person believe in Jesus to the point that they know they're going to heaven when they die? Sure. But that's not all that God wants us to tell people. God doesn't just call us to make believers; He calls us to make disciples, i.e., people who live their lives according to everything Jesus thought, said, and did, Matthew 28:18-20. In fact, when we see Jesus evangelize, we never hear Him just mention life after death or hell. He's constantly talking about life now too. He talks to people about their problems, the struggles they're having in their lives right now and how He's able to save them from them.

How did Jesus evangelize? What's the Gospel, the Goodnews that Jesus gives people? Does He talk about hell? Mark's Gospel is a great example of Jesus in action. He begins by telling the people that God's Kingdom is here, thus, they need to repent and believe in the Gospel, 1:15. So what's the Goodnews Jesus brings? He walks into a synagogue and frees a man possessed by demons, 1:26. He goes to Peter's house and heals his mother-in-law of fever, 1:31. People get wind of what Jesus can do and they flock to him by the hundreds as He takes their demons and diseases away, 1:34. He runs into a leper and He takes his leprosy away, 1:42. As He preaches in a house, He brings life to the legs of a paralyzed man by forgiving his sins, 2:5-12. He enters another synagogue and finds a man with a withered hand and He restores it, 3:5. He runs into a man who's forced to live surrounded by death but Jesus brings to him life, 5:1-15. A father pleads for Him to heal his little girl. By the time He gets there, she's dead, so He brings her back to life, 5:42. Everywhere Jesus goes He's turning back death and bringing life back to the people. The Goodnews is that Jesus is the eternal life that will save you...and not just from hell.

But what about when Jesus has one-on-one conversations with people, what did He say? If there was ever a time for Jesus to give a succinct Gospel message that talked about salvation from hell, it was when the rich young ruler asked Him how he could inherit eternal life, Mark 10:17-22. What was Jesus' response? According to 21st century evangelism, Jesus seems to get it all wrong; He tells the guy to work for his salvation! What?!

First, the young man thought he could work for his eternal life. Second, he likely thought he was very close, aside from some minor requirement. Therefore, Jesus plays along with his idea, but not before He corrects him. He thinks eternal life can be earned, so Jesus immediately corrects his erroneous view of "good." Jesus points out that there's no one in the universe who qualifies as good, except God. But we're dealing with someone who thinks he's good enough to earn salvation. So Jesus tells him to keep God's commandments. To which he promptly replies, "No problem, I've kept them all since I was a kid." Jesus cares deeply about this young man so He cuts to the chase and puts His finger on the real problem, "Let go of all your wealth and cling to Me." That thought terrified him, so he walked away deeply depressed because his wealth was his god, his identity, his all in all....his salvation. He couldn't let go of it.

Is Jesus saying that you have to work for your salvation? No! In fact, this was the first thing Jesus addressed. When Jesus corrects his view of "good," Jesus is telling him, "No amount of work will ever render you good enough to earn eternal life and entrance into God's Kingdom." Then why did Jesus tell him to do good Christian works? Shouldn't Jesus teach him how to live the Christian life *after* he becomes a Christian? Not according to Jesus. Why not? Because Jesus didn't see evangelism as a formula. Instead, He met every person right where they were. Therefore, Jesus had no problem first saving this young man's earthly life—recall that Jesus didn't come just to save us from hell—before He saved his eternal life. After all, the only kind of life Jesus offers is eternal and it can also save you from a hellish existence dominated by wealth. Therefore, if the young man had taken up his cross and followed Jesus, he would've quickly realized that Jesus wasn't just there to correct his twisted view of wealth. He was there to offer him every facet of eternal life in God's kingdom—**10:23**. In fact, this is Mark's message: Jesus didn't just come to tinker around the edges. Yes, He came to fix all our problems and forgive our sins (1:34; 2:5, 12; 8:25), but not apart from entrance into God's kingdom (1:15; **10:23**).

III. Conclusion

... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.