

Testimony Against Them

In the passage of scripture that we will study here today in Luke chapter 9, Jesus faces us with a question that we most often really, really don't want to know the answer too. And that question is, "Is there ever a time when we should "give up" in our efforts to reach out to and minister to a person or to a group of people"?

Being a pastor that gets to know other pastors, I have been aware of the discouragement and frustration that some pastors have suffered concerning their congregations. They know the lifestyles and the broken family relationships that are taking place within their church membership. And week after week those pastors pour out their hearts, and pour out the gospel to their congregations, but often see very little change taking place. And eventually those pastors get so discouraged that they just give up and go and find another church.

The question again that is presented to us within this scripture passage before us today, "Is there ever a time when we should "give up" in our efforts to reach out to and to minister to a person or to a group of people"?

And folks, that question becomes ever so difficult when it involves people who are very dear to us, perhaps intimate friends, or perhaps even our own beloved family members.

Here in our scripture passage today, Jesus was preparing His disciples to go out on their first missionary journey. And He knew that they would be faced with all manner of response from the people they encountered, especially "rejection". And so, He very wisely faced them "head-on" with that reality, that there would surely be times when they would have to simply "give up" and walk away. Listen to these words in Luke chapter 9, beginning in verse 4.

⁴"Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." (Luke 9:4-5)

As I've said to us on other occasions, one of the hazards of examining these scriptures in the manner that we do, line by line and verse by verse, is that we will often run up against words that we would rather not deal with, words that run contrary to our normal thought processes, words that sometimes even

appear contradictory to other scriptures. And that is so with these few words of verses 4 and 5. Listen again.

⁴“Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” (Luke 9:4-5)

Here in these brief words, Jesus presents the two sides of the gospel missionary effort, first, the one who gives the gospel message, then next, the receivers and their responses to the gospel message being given. Then after that, in very clear words, Jesus adds a special addendum for those times that the receivers reject the gospel message.

And that special addendum brings that very important question to us for consideration. That question again is, “Will there ever be a time when we as witnesses for Christ should intentionally give up on our efforts to give the gospel to certain people?”

It is clear from these words of scripture and it is clear from our own experience as we share our witness, that there are some people, perhaps many, who want nothing at all to do with the gospel. The gospel is distasteful, even painful to their ears and they will do whatever they can to avoid its message. They instead choose a broader path of life that will accommodate their behavior and their conduct.

Those people are spoken about in Matthew 7

¹³“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. ¹⁴Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

There are so many people in today's culture who love the comfort and convenience they enjoy as they walk their “broad path” of life. They want nothing to do with the restrictive nature of the “narrow path”. And they want nothing to do with the message of the gospel and freely express their feelings to us when we attempt to witness to them.

And that response is not just limited to those people in the larger, more liberal cities. It is true also here in the smaller towns that we live in. If I were to try to do as those disciples did, go house to house here in our town asking the people if I

could stay with them for a few days while I preached to them and to the people on these city streets, I have no doubt that I would be hard pressed to find many who would receive me.

But before we cast too many stones at those people, we really should think through those kinds of circumstances from our own perspective! Would you, would I feel comfortable in having a stranger come to live in our house, going out each day and preaching on the streets, even perhaps bringing some of his converts back into our home to disciple them further?

Unfortunately, you and I are creatures of comfort. We enjoy our privacy. And we also have a firm distrust for strangers.

And besides that, we might not believe like they do. That was probably very much so with these disciples. The biblical teaching of these disciples was decidedly different from the message they had heard in their synagogues most all their lives.

Unfortunately for those disciples, they did not have the advantage of a Billy Graham Association type team of forerunners who would go out ahead of them to saturate an area with an advertising blitz announcing that evangelists were coming into town with a special crusade.

Yes, perhaps there might have been some people in the outlying towns that had seen and heard Jesus on other occasions. And perhaps some of them had invited the disciples to come and minister in their town. And perhaps some of them did form their own teams of people to spread the word in their towns about the disciples. That certainly would have been a good plan to follow.

And certainly also, the first moment that the townspeople heard that the disciples were healing the sick and driving out demons, many of them would have at least been curious to find out about those things.

But it is also true that many others, perhaps most, would want nothing to do with the disciples. Recall the rejection that Jesus suffered after He drove the demons out of the man in the Gadarene tombs. Those local townspeople wanted nothing more to do with Jesus and asked Him to leave.

But more than just the common distrust that people have for strangers who do odd things, we need to always remember that there is always another, far more sinister element at work in every circumstance. The demonic spiritual world is ever and always in vehement opposition to the gospel. And they will fight it at every point.

These words that we have read so often from Ephesians chapter 6, serve as a reminder to us. Listen.

¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

The demon world is always at war against the gospel of God. And they will incite the minds of anyone who will listen to reject the gospel and to drive away those who would present it.

And also, there is a pervasive truth that is present in this dark world that we live within. And that pervasive truth is that we do love our private sins and we don't want someone to come and show the light of the Lord Jesus into our dark world. We want our sins to stay hidden. Jesus spoke about that in John chapter 3. There He said,

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (John 3:19-20)

There is every possible element at work to influence a listener to reject the gospel, a person's own self-centered sinfulness, then also the intimidation of others who tell them not to listen, and then added to that, the often overwhelming influence of the demons who live and thrive in amongst us each day.

With all those added together, those disciples then, and you and me now are ever and always up against a formidable force of rejection of the gospel message.

. . . And so, without much explanation at all, here at the end of verse 5, Jesus gives us an emphatic response that is to be shown to those people who reject His gospel. Here, He said

⁵And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” (Luke 9:5)

I confess to you that these words seem so contrary to the usual pursuit that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit makes toward lost souls. And the question arises, “Does this mean that there really is a limit to the efforts we are to go to in our evangelism of lost souls? Does this mean that there is a time to quit our efforts and to not only let the people sink into hell, but to also ourselves literally participate in the judgment against them for their rejection of the gospel by shaking off the very dust from our feet as a testimony against them.

In another instruction to the disciples on another occasion, Jesus had said ¹⁸“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

We might wonder, as those disciples shook the dust off their feet against those unbelievers, were those people being bound over to eternal destruction or was the disciple’s actions just a stern warning? We don’t know for sure.

But Jesus’ command also brings the question to us as modern day disciples who go out and give the message of the gospel. What is to be our response to people who reject the gospel that we give?

I do believe that these words here are as true for you and me as they were for those disciples. Yes, we are to spend every effort and energy telling people about the salvation of Christ, but sadly, we must also know that God’s Spirit will not contend with the sinful nature of people forever.

There are choices that God leaves to men and women, choices that can determine their eternal destiny, choices that will bring them either eternal life or eternal death. All of that is made very clear by the words given in Deuteronomy 30! Listen to these words.

¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you

¹⁷But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I announce to you today that you shall surely perish . . .

¹⁹I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He *is* your life and the length of your days. (Deuteronomy 30:15-19)

Notice carefully in these words that God is giving a very judicial type of pronouncement. He tells us

¹⁹I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

And then similarly, here again in our today's text from Luke chapter 9, the Lord Jesus tells us

⁵And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." (Luke 9:4-5)

There is a witness, a testimony taking place in each of our souls, and that witness, that testimony is either in our favor or it is against us. If that testimony is in our favor, it will come from Christ declaring that He has died for us and wiped away all our sins and that we are to be set free indeed, and eternally so.

But if the testimony is against us, if our behavior and our conduct has been to reject Christ and His gospel, then we also will be rejected, eternally.

Again, yes, God does truly want you and me to accept Him. He does not desire that any should perish. But the reality is, we have choices and we do make choices, both good choices and bad ones. And all in amongst our choosing, his voice is continually crying out to us, "choose life, that both you and your descendants, your children and your grandchildren may live."

But sadly, even with His Spirit crying out to our Spirit, some people, perhaps many, still refuse to hear His cry of mercy. Their ears become deaf to His voice, and to their eternal loss, they commit their souls to the pit of hell. Listen to these words in Hebrews chapter 6,

4 . . . *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

Folks, in those words is a very sad but absolute reality. Those words speak about a person who has come really close to salvation. They have heard the words of the truth of the gospel. Some might have sat in church pews often, some even most all their lives. But by their own choice, they have turned away from it.

And according to these words from the Lord Jesus that we are studying here today, there truly will probably come a time when we who witness for Christ will need to consider doing as these disciples were instructed to do, to accept that those people have made their decision to turn away from Christ and to go their own way.

I confess to you that I don't know that I will be able to obey this instruction from the Lord. I know that I must be obedient to Him and that His commands and instructions are good. But as of this moment in time, I don't know that I can truly "give up" on some of those lost one.

Does not this cause you to weep? It should, because folks, as I mentioned a moment ago, these lost ones are not just some unknown strangers on the street or on the other side of the world. These lost ones are our loved ones, our husbands, our wives, our brothers and our sisters, our mothers, and our fathers, and yes, even our own dear children and grandchildren.

And these scriptures are clear in their description of the sure and certain penalty for those who refuse the salvation that the Lord Jesus offers. That penalty will be an eternity of unimaginable sufferings in hell, with no possibility of hope or of relief, only anguished suffering.

And we don't have forever to bring those lost ones onto that narrow way that leads to righteousness. Both our days and their days are truly limited. And while God is still willing to contend with their rebellious spirits, let's you and me be faithful to continue to give them the salvation gospel. It is our calling and our responsibility, both to Christ and to them.

As one of our favorite hymns exhorts us,
Rescue the perishing, Care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o'er the erring one, Lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

Folks, let's commit ourselves to giving all that we are to this special calling.

Let's pray.