

Called to Share the Good News

Rich Nathan
February 10 & 11, 2018
Called
2 Kings 6:24-7:9

I'd like to begin by speaking to those of you who consider yourselves followers of Jesus. I know there are many of you listening to me right now who don't think of yourselves that way or aren't sure where you stand in relationship to Jesus. But for those of you who say, "I'm a follower of Jesus" – how many of you believe that you have the gift of evangelism? You frequently have Jesus-centered conversations with those who don't follow him. You easily share your faith with those who are not yet Christians. You have a track record of helping people begin a life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Let me share with you a list of some of the many, many reasons that we don't share our Christian faith with those who don't know Jesus.

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- We are not gifted in evangelism.

The vast, vast majority of us (including me) don't feel particularly gifted in sharing our Christian faith.

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- We feel uncomfortable: we fear we'll make the other person uncomfortable.
- We don't like feeling like religious salesmen.
- We don't want to push our religious beliefs on others.
- We don't want to be shunned or dismissed as religious fanatics or anti-intellectual or anti-science.
- We don't know what to say so as not to offend, especially if the other person has a different faith tradition.
- We don't want people to think we have certain political beliefs or bigotries.

And if we share our Christian faith, they may immediately associate us with some politician or famous Christian spokesperson with whom we strongly disagree.

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- We are not extroverted. Sharing Christian faith is for extroverts. It helps if you're pushy and obnoxious.
- We're just going to live our faith, not talk about it.
- We're not Billy Graham. Sharing Christian faith is best left to professionals.
- We fear being asked a question we don't know the answer to.

- We fear paying a price in terms of professional advancement or relational acceptance.

You may have your own set of reasons why you, as a follower of Jesus, rarely or never share your Christian faith. Bottom line, there are very, very few followers of Jesus who regularly share their Christian faith with others.

In this New Year, I've been doing a series titled Called in which I've spoken about various things that God calls a person to. He calls us to particular tasks in our families, in our workplaces, particular acts of service. God calls people to be in community with each other and not to be isolated or to be hermits. God calls people to be generous and to give of our time and our money. God calls us to experience more of himself. And today as we wrap up this series, I want to talk about one more calling that God gives to those who are in relationship with him. We are "Called to Share the Good News". Let's invite the Lord's presence. Let's pray.

Again, let me, if I may, speak to those of you who consider yourselves followers of Jesus for a moment. Especially if you have been a follower of Jesus for more than a few years.

You probably have read these verses from the gospel of Matthew:

Slide Matthew 10:32-33

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

It was these two verses in Matthew 10 that really ran my wife, Marlene, through in the summer before she went to college. A leader in her high school fellowship group asked her, "Marlene, do you ever share your faith?" She said, "No, not really!" Marlene has always been incredibly honest. And the guy said, "You know what Jesus said..." and he quoted Matthew 10:32-33.

Slide Matthew 10:32-33

³² "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

She went ahead and shared her faith with a guy she worked with at Lawson's convenience store and became a Christian. Marlene said that she was so excited about seeing someone come to faith. She went to college promising God that she would share her faith even if it was really hard for her or made her feel uncomfortable. Then, the first week of classes in college, she met me – a Jewish hardcore atheist smart aleck from New York City. And she decided to not deny Jesus, but to acknowledge him with me.

And it was through Marlene and her acknowledgement of Jesus that I came to know him as my Savior and Lord.

So, it is almost impossible to be a follower of Jesus for very long and not know some Bible verses about the importance of sharing our faith. I could give you dozens of verses like that – we’ve all read them. So, why is it that we don’t? As I think about why we don’t share our faith and I listed a whole bunch of reasons at the front end, but I think the bottom line is that we really don’t believe what we claim to believe.

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We don’t really believe what we claim to believe

Oh, I know there are other things – we don’t want to offend and we don’t know everything we want to know and there’s a price to pay with others and so on.

But if we really believe what we claim to believe, we’d figure out ways how not to offend and be wiser and more tactful in our sharing. We would search out answers to hard questions. And we’d be willing to pay the price of social or professional loss of status. After all, what is that compared to the gift of eternal life? I’d like to suggest that the bottom line reason why we don’t share our faith from those who are disconnected from Jesus is that we don’t believe what we claim to believe.

Let me work this out for you and see at the end of the talk if you agree with me. Let’s read together:

Slide 2 Kings 6:24-29

²⁴Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. ²⁵There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey’s head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

²⁶As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, “Help me, my lord the king!”

²⁷The king replied, “If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?” ²⁸Then he asked her, “What’s the matter?”

She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we’ll eat my son.’ ²⁹So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, ‘Give up your son so we may eat him,’ but she had hidden him.”

Now, you need to understand that in the ancient world cities, especially key cities, were protected by high walls. So when an enemy army swept into a country the local population and its army would run into the city, close the city gates, and they were safe behind high city walls.

When an army laid siege to a city, they wouldn't permit anyone in the city to leave, they wouldn't permit anyone to enter, there were no food shipments into the city. The tactic was designed to starve the local population into submission.

And that's what happened. We read:

Slide 2 Kings 6:25

²⁵There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

If you read back in Jewish law found in the Torah, you would discover that eating of donkeys was forbidden to the Jewish people. But their fate had sunk to such a low level that they were now not only willing to eat what was forbidden, but also they were willing to eat the most disgusting part of the donkey, the donkey's head. And if you check the note in the NIV, where it says in verse 25

Slide 2 Kings 6:25

²⁵There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

Many translators say that the better translation is a quarter of a cab of pigeon dung.

After WWII, if you read history, you discover that many refugees in Europe were reduced to eating stray cats and dogs, and even mice and rats. It is not uncommon in history for people to be reduced to eating things they never thought they would eat just to stay alive.

And the people's situation becomes so desperate that the nation reaches the lowest point that humanity can reach. They actually begin to engage in cannibalism.

Slide 2 Kings 6:27-29

Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son.' So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son so we may eat him,' but she had hidden him."

There are few stories in the whole of the Bible that are more terrible than this story in 2 Kings. We read of a woman eating the corpse of her dead son. And her complaint is not that her situation was so desperate that she was forced to eat the corpse of her dead son. Her complaint is that she had been deceived by another woman who didn't share her dead son so they could consume him.

I said before that the bottom line reason most of us who are followers of Jesus rarely or never share our faith is that we don't believe what we claim to believe. This story of utter horror tells us one basic thing about people that we don't believe.

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We don't believe that people really need God

We look at our neighbor who is not a follower of Jesus or a co-worker or a friend who is not a follower of Jesus and they seem to be just fine without Jesus – thank you very much. In fact, far from being needy or starving like these famine victims in this story we just read, our non-Christian neighbors or friends seem to be quite full and content with their lives just the way they are. They enjoy their kids. They volunteer to coach soccer. They have lovely vacations. Their businesses are doing really well. As for spirituality – the wife does yoga and goes to a wellness spa once a year and the husband plays golf and loves to mountain bike in the woods – their form of spirituality doesn't involve God and they don't seem to need God much.

So, why should we believe that people really need God and without him life is radically incomplete? Why should we believe that everyone without God experiences a spiritual famine whatever it is they claim? Well, if the Bible's basic storyline is true, if you believe the Bible's basic storyline – that there is a personal God who made human beings for relationship with himself and that this personal God is highly intentional and purposeful in all that he does then there is a point to life. We don't simply live in a senseless world of random haphazard events where we make it up as we go. There's a point to life given to us by our Creator.

What is the point of life given to us by God our Creator? Back in the 17th century, some theologians and pastors in England wrote a catechism to teach children. It was called the Westminster Shorter Catechism and for generations this catechism was taught to Presbyterian children and those from the Reformed tradition. The catechism was written in the form of a series of questions and answers. The child would memorize the answer. Question one in the Westminster Shorter Catechism was this:

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What is the chief end of man?

In other words, what is the point of life? What is the purpose that God designed us for as human beings? The answer that the child was to recite was this:

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Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

In other words, we exist to give God glory, to live for his purposes and to enjoy God. To not relate to God is to miss the entire point of life. You understand what missing the

point is, don't you? I mean, it's like having a wedding so you can wear a white dress or a tuxedo people would give you gifts. You're missing the point of a wedding! You think that's the wedding is the end all and be all, but the point of a wedding is to end up married to this other person for the rest of your life! The wedding isn't the point. Marriage is.

It's like buying a Lamborghini in order to pull a U-Haul trailer full of junk. You're missing the point of the Lamborghini. The point of owning a Lamborghini is so that everyone will envy you and you can take it out on the open road and go from 0 to 60 in two seconds. Does our neighbor need God? However wonderful kids and vacations and a nice house and a career and mountain biking is – none of these things constitute the point of life. If you want to discover the point of life and don't want to live a wasted life, you need a relationship with God.

Why don't we share our faith?

Slide

- We don't believe what we claim to believe.
- We don't believe that people really need God.

Here's the third thing:

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We don't believe that the good news is really true

Slide 2 Kings 7:1-2

Elisha replied, "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of the finest flour will sell for a shekel¹ and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

²The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?"

"You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!"

You understand what this officer was saying, don't you? He's saying to God's prophet, Elisha, this great message you're telling the people is too good to be true. In other words, no way, I hear what you're saying but it can't happen because it's too good to be true. I think that one major reason we don't share our faith is because we don't believe that the good news is really true. We think it's too good to be true.

For example, let's just take the very simple gospel promise found in 1 John.

Slide 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness

We look at someone whose life is really messed up. He or she has made a lot of terrible choices. Maybe they've been wounded by a whole bunch of folks in their past – parents, stepparents, foster parents, ex-boyfriends or girlfriends, teachers, coaches, employers, whatever – they are coming out of this place of hurt and woundedness they added to the chaos by making really bad choices.

Do we believe the simple gospel promise for such a person? That they can be entirely forgiven and made clean for everything they've done and everything they've failed to do in life. Many of us may say we've heard, perhaps from the time we were little, the gospel message, the good news that God would forgive anyone's sins and transfer anyone's guilt onto his Son, Jesus. Maybe from the time we were little we heard that God is the only judge and that God is willing to declare innocent anyone who comes to Jesus in faith acknowledging their sins. That trusting in Jesus plus nothing will allow that person to receive forgiveness and cleansing and healing. We look at that person and all the ways they are messed up and we say, "No way is the good news of the gospel good enough for that person. At the minimum they need 20 years of therapy."

The gospel's promise of healing and forgiveness is too good to be true!

Why don't we share our faith?

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- We don't believe what we claim to believe.
- We don't believe that people really need God.
- We don't believe that the good news is really true

Slide

We don't believe the logic of taking a risk on God.

Here's what we read:

Slide 2 Kings 7:3-4

³Now there were four men with leprosy^[a] at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die? ⁴If we say, 'We'll go into the city'—the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die."

I love the logic, the reasonableness, of these lepers. We don't have to be certain of the outcome in order to take a risk. If we don't do anything we're going to die. Whereas, if we take a risk maybe it will work out. You might say, "I'm not certain if this person's life will improve if I share my faith with them. I'm not certain they'll accept it. I'm not

certain therefore, I'll do nothing." The lepers say that you don't have to be certain of all the outcomes, but if you don't share your faith we can be certain of this, the person will lose and so will you.

There was a philosopher back in the 17th century named Pascal. He came up with what has become known as Pascal's wager. Let me paraphrase Pascal's wager for you. He essentially says to a person who is disconnected from God, maybe doesn't believe in God or maybe they just don't think about God very much – there might be someone out there, but God is pretty irrelevant to them – Pascal essentially says, "If you're right and there is no God and there is no heaven and when you die, the only thing you have to look forward to is rotting in the ground. That's the best you can hope for, for you to rot in the ground. But if you're wrong – and I as a Christian am right – then your rejection of God is going to land you in hell. You will be cut off from God forever."

Then he went on to say, "If I as a Christian am wrong and you're right then I guess I'll just rot in the ground, but I've lived a good life. I've gotten wisdom for my marriage, my child-raising, my friendships, my work life. But if I'm right, I enjoy God's presence now and in the future I enjoy life with God forever. Whereas, the best you can hope for is rotting in the ground and the worst is experiencing hell forever. What do you have to lose by receiving Christ?"

See, we don't have to be certain of the outcome to share our faith in Christ. To know someone who is precious to you is dying and a doctor said that there is this new miracle drug, but he couldn't guarantee it to work. It had a 50/50 chance of saving your loved one's life. Would it be reasonable to take the drug even if it cost a little bit of money? Suppose it was free – it wouldn't cost anything – wouldn't it be utterly reasonable to try it and completely unreasonable not to try it?

Or suppose you heard a report that your house is on fire and your children are inside. You don't know if the report is true or not. Would the reasonable thing to do be, "You know I don't know if it's true so I'm not going to drive to my house or call the fire department. I'll just keep working because I'm not certain that it's worth it to check this out."

Sure, I don't know if this other person will accept the good news, but I know if I don't share it and every other Christian takes the position that I take – they don't share it either – then there's no chance for that person. They are just going to die without God.

Why don't we share our Christian faith?

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- We don't believe what we claim to believe.
- We don't believe that people really need God.
- We don't believe that the good news is really true.

- We don't believe the logic of taking a risk on God.

The final reason we don't share our faith is because:

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We don't believe that we can make a difference.

Let's read:

Slide 2 Kings 7:5-9

⁵At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, no one was there, ⁶for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!" ⁷So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.

⁸The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp, entered one of the tents and ate and drank. Then they took silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.

⁹Then they said to each other, "What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace."

Like the lepers we're so busy enjoying the good things we have found in Jesus, we forget about telling anyone else. And we may look at ourselves like the lepers surely did and say, "The good news simply won't be accepted because of some defect in me." What could be the defect in us that would keep us from sharing? Well, I can think of two defects as we close.

The first thing we say about ourselves:

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I'm an introvert not an extrovert

You know, nearly half of all adults are introverts. People misunderstand what an introvert is. Introverts are not necessarily shy or anti-social. Introverts don't prefer tons of social interaction because they feel overloaded – not because of fear or anxiety. Introverts could be shy, but not necessarily. They just prefer interaction with people in smaller doses. The most common definition of an introvert is somebody who gets drained by socializing and recharges by being alone.

Whereas extroverts get charged by being with others. Introverts often enjoy staying at home rather than going to one social event after another. They like solitary activities. You know, woodworking or gardening or reading or drawing or playing a musical instrument or gaming. They like being with a few close friends, not crowds of people all the time. They don't enjoy small talk.

Here's the deal. The American church is set up for extroverts and not for introverts. The way we do small groups sometimes is set up for extroverts and not introverts. In lots of small groups, the lesson might be for 15 minutes and then people are supposed to fellowship with each other for an hour and a half and hang out just chatting. There's no real engagement in the scriptures. There's often no real engagement with God. We might have a brief discussion about how we feel about a couple of verses and then everybody shares what they feel. As a group, we may pray quickly and then it's on to small talk with a bunch of strangers. Introverts tend to like the study part of small group and the prayer part more than the small talk or share your deepest feelings part.

You know, by now all of you should be know that we're beginning a discipleship campaign titled "The Real Jesus" next week. It occurs to me that the discipleship campaign that we're doing on "The Real Jesus" is specifically designed for introverts. I've filmed six 20-minute videos about Jesus in one of his roles. If you get involved in one of these groups that are doing "The Real Jesus" material, you'll watch a video for 20 minutes with no one staring at you expecting you to speak. You can prepare ahead. Everyone who participates in "The Real Jesus" small group will get a study guide where they'll be able to read passages ahead of time.

And introverts, you can, if you want, actually create your own small group with people that you know rather than a bunch of strangers. You can gather a few close friends or family members and all you need is 2-3 others and you can host your own group. I'm going to ask you whether you're an extrovert or an introvert, sign up to host during "The Real Jesus" campaign.

If you've signed up to host or even if you haven't, I want to encourage you to invite people to this campaign. This campaign is all about inviting people to explore more about the person of Jesus. I'm going to ask the ushers to come down the aisle and give to each of you a three pack of invitation cards and think about who you can invite to participate in this campaign or to join you in a small group.

I'll finish with this:

If we believe that every person needs God, whether they live in Central Ohio or around the world, we might decide to participate in one of the church's short term mission trips. Immediately following the service in the lobby, not only are we going to have tables set up for those who want to host a group or join a group, but we're going to have someone from International Ministries available to talk to you about our short

term mission trips. We're putting trips together to visit Muslim refugees in a refugee camp in Jordan and you also have the opportunity to serve refugees in our city. Next year, we're going to be taking seven short term mission trips in Jordan and we're also going to engage local refugees right here in Central Ohio.

Brothers and sisters, you and I are called. Called by God who made us and he sent his Son to die for us. We're called by God to share our faith. Let's pray.

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- I. We don't really believe what we claim to believe.
- II. We don't believe that people really need God.
- III. We don't believe that the good news is really true.
- IV. We don't believe the logic of taking a risk on God.
- V. We don't believe that we can make a difference.