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1

WORD AND DEED EVANGELISM

Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them (Genesis 3:21).

Poverty is nothing new. It has plagued mankind from the very beginning of time. Almost.

It all started in the garden.

Adam and Eve impoverished themselves amidst the riches of Eden by sinning against God and transgressing His Law. Suddenly, there in the shadow of plenty, they knew real poverty. They became utterly destitute.

Pain and sorrow became their lot (Genesis 3:16). Hardship and calamity became the course of their lives (Genesis 3:17). They fell from riches to rags, from a well-watered garden to a progressively more wretched wasteland (Genesis 3:18–19, 23–24).

When God came to them in the cool of the day, they were huddled together in their misery and their shame (Genesis 3:7–8). He looked upon their broken estate and saw their pitiful poverty.

So how did He respond to them? What did God do?

First, He pronounced a Word of judgement on them. He conducted a kind of courtroom lawsuit against them: questioning, interrogating, cross-examining, and sentencing. He judged their sin (Genesis 3:14–19).

Next, He pronounced a Word of hope for them. He opened the prophetic books and revealed the promise of a Deliverer, a Savior. He gave them good news (Genesis 3:15).

And finally, He confirmed His Word with deeds. He killed an animal (or animals) and clothed them in the hides. He covered

them. He showed them mercy. He matched judgement and grace with charity (Genesis 3:21).

There in the cool of the garden, in the shadow of plenty, God confronted the sin of Adam and Eve. And He did it by meeting their deprivation with judgement first, good news second, and charity third.

This is the Biblical model, the divine model, of *true evangelism*.

True evangelism announces to sinful men that they have disobeyed a Holy God, that He will find them out, and that He will pronounce judgement against them.

True evangelism also offers hope. It tells sinful men that there is a Savior who crushes the serpent's head and redeems them from their plight.

But as essential as those two announcements are, true evangelism is not complete without charity. True evangelism involves both Word and deed.

God *verified* His Word of judgement and His Word of hope with sacrificial, merciful compassion. *That* is true evangelism.

When we proclaim the gospel to the nations, we must take great care to follow this model. If we fail to share God's abhorrence of sin and rebellion, we haven't truly evangelized. If we fail to share God's gracious provision of the cross of Christ, we haven't truly evangelized. This should be quite evident from the Scriptures. But at the same time, if we leave out the charity that *testifies* to the *ultimate charity* of God, then we haven't truly evangelized, either. That should be equally evident from the Scriptures.

Excuses, Excuses

Have you ever noticed the excuses that Adam and Eve gave for their sin?

Adam said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, *she* gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). "Not me! It was her!"

Eve said, "The serpent deceived me and I ate" (Genesis 3:13). "Not me! It was him!"

Now in all fairness, neither of them actually lied. Both excuses were true. But they were *lame* excuses, nonetheless. Both sinners refused to face up to the fact: *They* had actually disobeyed God Almighty. They had no one to blame but themselves.

But blame they did: Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent.

Even that was not the worst of it, though. *Both of them also blamed God*. It was the woman God had given to him who was at

fault, Adam said. In other words, "God, You messed up. You placed me in a poor environment. I was only responding to my circumstances. It's not my fault, God. It's *Your* fault!"

Eve said just about the same thing. "Look God, I was deceived. It wasn't my fault. I'm just a woman. This serpent here is very shrewd. Devilish, even. He knew just how to deceive the likes of me. So why did You let him into the garden? It's all *Your* fault. You should have known better than to let me be taken advantage off"

This sort of argument is the essence of sinful, rebellious poverty. Wherever it exists, there can be no escape from the downward spiral of want. If we refuse to regard ourselves as responsible agents before God, if we refuse to see our environment as something to be transformed by righteous labor, thrift, and planning for the future, then poverty of body and soul is our inescapable lot. If, like Adam and Eve, we insist that somebody else is responsible for our condition, then we will always be poor.

That is why God issues His Word of *judgement*. He will not let us excuse our sin. He forces us to accept personal responsibility for our sorry lot.

Grace and Charity

But God does not leave us under stern condemnation. He matches judgement with grace and charity.

Adam and Eve sinned. *Then* they tried to cover their sin by their own pitiful works: fig leaf aprons. *Then* they tried to hide from God. *Then* they tried to blame each other, or their environment, or God, or anyone but themselves.

They were deserving of death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23). They had eaten the forbidden fruit. But God mercifully relented. Instead of immediately executing His holy wrath upon them, he graciously extended their lives.

And not only that, He graciously tended to their needs as well. He covered them.

God extended their lives by *grace*. He looked forward in time to the death of His Son Jesus, and He afforded them life for the sake of that ultimate sacrifice.

God covered their nakedness with *charity*. He looked forward in time to the robe of Christ's righteousness and He afforded them covering for the sake of that ultimate substitution.

God gave them *grace* (life). And God gave them *charity* (covering). Clearly, grace and charity are two sides of the same coin. Both come from the same root word in Greek: *charis*. Both flow forth from

the mercy seat of Almighty God. Both are necessary to complete the work of evangelism begun by judgement.

God gave. Man received. Grace and charity quick on the heels of judgement. There was no legal obligation involved except the legal obligation that man trust and submit to God.

True evangelism always adheres to this pattern. It involves two clear messages: the coming judgement of God, and God's lawful way of escape in Christ the sin-bearer. Thus, the evangelist actually imitates God's pronouncement of judgement *against* the sinner and grace *to* the sinner when he preaches the gospel.

But if he stops there, he has not truly evangelized. Evangelism is not just words. It also involves deeds. It involves charity by the message-bearer, who imitates God's gift of the coverings to Adam and Eve. God is the model for judgement, grace, *and* charity.

Isaiah's Evangelism

We see this evangelical pattern in the testimony of the prophet Isaiah. He announces judgement. He announces a way of escape. And then he issues a call to charity.

Following God's model he said:

Cry aloud, spare not; Lift up your voice like a trumpet; Declare to My people their transgression, And the house of Jacob their sins.... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light will break out like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, And your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; You shall cry, and He will say, "Here I am." If you take away the yoke from your midst, The pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, If you extend your soul to the hungry, And satisfy the afflicted soul Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall be as the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to dwell in (Isaiah 58:1, 6-12).

God made His evangelistic program clear to Isaiah. *First*, he was to tell the people of Judah that they were in sin: "Declare to My people their transgression." *Second*, he was to reveal the way out: They were to fast in repentance. *Finally*, he was to point them toward righteous charity: They were not to starve themselves in a *ritual* fast, but to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to let the oppressed go free, to feed the hungry, to invite the homeless into their homes, to provide clothing for the naked.

Once again, here is God's plan of evangelism: First, announce the judgement of sin; second, proclaim the good news of hope; and third, take up the work of charity. First, *wrath against sin*. Second, *grace covering over sin*. And third, *charity soothing the hurts of sin*.

Christ's Evangelism

Jesus too confirmed this Word and deed pattern of evangelism. When He began His public ministry in the town of Nazareth, He went into the synagogue, as was His custom, and stood up to read. What He read was significant: the passage from Isaiah 61 that deals with the coming of the Messiah.

Who is the Messiah? The Anointed One who preaches the gospel to the poor:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To preach deliverance to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

Isaiah had prophesied that the Anointed One would go into the highways and byways to heal the lame, to give sight to the blind, and to comfort the brokenhearted. Jesus proved His position as the Messiah by doing literally what Isaiah said He would do. So in the synagogue He boldly announced the prophetic fulfillment: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Christ never shied away from announcing God's condemnation of sin (Matthew 7:13-23). Neither did He hesitate to announce the good news of hope (Matthew 11:28-30). But without acts of charity to back up those words, He would have seemed just another phony savior, just another false Christ.

Jesus proved He was the Messiah by wedding Word and deed. He authenticated His claims by combining judgement and grace with charity: He took liberty to the captives.

Charity was central to His ministry among us for this reason. He became poor for our sake, meting out charity because that was His Messianic task: to follow God's eternal pattern and save the perishing.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

We owe everything to Christ. Our riches, however defined, come from Him. He experienced poverty to make our blessings possible. He became a servant for our sake. He exercised charity on our behalf.

And then came the ultimate charity: He suffered death and separation from God His Father for the sake of placating God's eternal wrath against us.

He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.... (Philippians 2:7-10).

Talk about serious charity! Yes, Jesus brought a message of judgement (Matthew 23:13-36). Yes, Jesus brought a message of great hope (Matthew 28:18-20). But He never let those words stand alone. He authenticated them with deeds.

What Does Charity Prove?

To challenge men with the gospel, we must first love them. Isaiah loved the people of Judah. He sacrificed his whole life to bring the message of salvation to those few who would listen. A man who has been loved by God is to show love to others: first, by proclaiming the coming judgement of God, second, by announcing His gracious escape, and third, by demonstrating commitment to God above, caring for the poor and helpless.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and

though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1–3 KJV).

What did charity prove in the life of Jesus? It proved that He cared for men. It proved that He loved them. It proved that He was willing to put His life on the line. It proved that He was being fully obedient to His Father. Finally, it proved that His Words had *authority*, because they were being put into *action*.

Shortly after the announcement of His messianic authority in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus healed a paralyzed man. Jesus stood in front of the Pharisees and lawyers, who were watching to see if He would in any way commit a transgression of God's law. The paralyzed man had been brought to Him in a unique way: his friends had broken a hole in the roof and lowered him down, to avoid the crowd around Jesus.

So when He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today! (Luke 5:20–26).

Jesus first drew attention to the man's sins. *Judgement*. Then He forgave him. *Grace*. And finally, in demonstration of His *authority* to judge and forgive, He raised the man *up*. *Charity*. Word was accompanied by deed.

Notice, that after Christ ministered to the man in this fashion the entire crowd was "amazed." They all "glorified God and were filled with fear." Seeing Word and deed *together*, they said with sheer astonishment, "We have seen strange things today."

Jesus *authenticated* the words of His mouth with the deeds of His hands. Jesus *demonstrated* the reality of His claims. And so the people *believed*.

Why does so much of our evangelism today have so little impact? Why do our best efforts so often fall on deaf ears? Could it be that we have strayed from God's pattern of evangelism? Could it

be that we have stripped Gospel Word of its validity and authenticity by neglecting to accompany it with Gospel charity?

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have deeds? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," and you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have deeds, is dead (James 2:14-17).

The world is looking for *proof*. They want *evidence*.

When Jesus wed Word and deed, the people who heard and saw got their proof. They needed no further evidence. They could see that this Gospel was not simply pie in the sky. It was a Gospel of hope. Real hope. It was a Gospel that made a *difference*.

Talk is cheap. True evangelism isn't.

Giving charity verifies the claims of the Gospel. It tells the world that there is indeed a sovereign gracious God who raises up faithful people, who blesses those people, and who gives them a loving disposition. It tells the world that there is a God who refills empty storehouses, replenishes dry cisterns, restocks depleted threshing floors, and opens hands and hearts. It tells the world that there is a God who instills such confidence in His followers that they can give, never fearing lack, that they can sacrifice, never lacking anything, that they can serve, never doubting provision. It provides proof.

Words of ultimate judgement and consummate hope need something to back them up in the eyes of sinful men. That "something" is charity.

Evangelism simply isn't complete if we fail to follow God's pattern of matching judgement and hope with charity.

Word and Deeds in History

Whenever and wherever the gospel has gone out, the faithful have emphasized the priority of good works, especially works of compassion toward the needy. They have matched the message of judgement and hope with charity. Every great revival in the history of the church, from Paul's missionary journeys to the Reformation, from Athanasius' Alexandrian outreach to America's Great Awakening, has been accompanied by an explosion of Christian care. Hospitals were established. Orphanages were founded. Rescue missions were started. Almshouses were built. Soup kitchens were begun. Charitable societies were incorporated. The hungry were fed,