

First Century Evangelism

Christ came into this world to live among men and to die on the cross that man might be saved. The Lord himself said, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Paul said, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

The Lord knew that He would not be in this world very long, so He chose twelve men and trained them during His three years of earthly ministry to carry on His work after His departure. These were ordinary, uneducated men. Some were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and the professions of the others were not important enough even to be identified. However, the important thing was that they were willing to leave their jobs and families to follow Jesus. On hearing His teaching and seeing His miracles, they were strengthened in their faith. When He told them that He would soon be going away, He promised to send the Comforter or the Holy Spirit to help them. Even though He was teaching them and preparing them for the work, still they were humans, subject to mistakes, certain to forget many of the things He had taught them. They would need the Holy Spirit to guide them in all of the things they said and did so that only the truth would be taught. They would also be enabled by the power of the Spirit to speak in other languages and to do miraculous things to convince the people that God was working through them. Jesus’ promise to the apostles was, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Continuing, Jesus said to the apostles, “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27). Please notice that the Lord was speaking *only* to the **apostles**, and **making these promises to them only**, because He identifies them as having been with Him **from the beginning**, that is, from the time of His baptism by John up to the time the promise was made. Part of their continued preparation was that **they would be with Him through His death, burial, and resurrection and His return to the Father in Heaven.**

Going on, Jesus says, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). He then said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come” (John 16:13). For the full story, read John the 14th chapter through the 16th chapter.

After the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection, He commanded the apostles to take the Gospel to all of the world, to every person in all of the world (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:30). Then He said that, first, they should remain in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high—that is, until the Comforter would be poured out upon them, which was the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8).

It is in Acts 2 that we read of the apostles waiting in Jerusalem, as Jesus had commanded. Just as had been promised, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them—they received the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit—so that whatever they said or did would be by His guidance. He enabled them to speak miraculously in the languages of the many nationalities in the audience, and to perform miracles. They continued to be led by the Holy Spirit during their lifetime as they obeyed the Lord and took the Gospel into all the world. By the end of the lives of the apostles, the New Testament had been given in written form, making available to all people the words inspired by the Spirit for all spiritual guidance since that time. Today, if we want to know what the Lord would have us to do, if we want to have His blessings and the hope of eternal life, we must turn to the New Testament. Paul says that we must study the Lord’s Word (2 Timothy 2:15), that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

However, even though the apostles were privileged to have the guidance of the Comforter, just think of what they, and the early Christians, had to deal with. They did not have the advantage of the New Testament in written form to read and to study and to follow. They were also going through an extremely difficult period of transition, from obedience to the Law of Moses, which was nailed to the cross at Christ’s death (Colossians 2:14), to recognition and acceptance of the Law of Christ, as was being revealed in the New Testament. Imagine how difficult it must have been to get the Jews to give up one religion that had been given exclusively to them by God, and to accept another—Christianity—in its place.

Then just think about the apostles being given the command to take the Gospel to the entire world! They were ordinary men, unlearned men. Who would believe them? Further, they were poor men. How could they influence the masses of the people? Almost from the beginning they were faced with persecution by the Jewish leadership, and then the Roman Empire began to imprison Christians and to demand that they curse Christ or they would be put to death. Yet, in spite of these seemingly insurmountable obstacles and problems, you cannot read where the apostles expressed doubt that they could evangelize the world. They didn’t offer the excuse that they were uneducated, or that they did not have the money for carrying out this Great Commission. Rather, Jesus had told them to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and finally to the uttermost parts of the earth, and that is exactly what they did! Some 30 years later, Paul said that the Gospel had been taken to every creature under heaven. What an accomplishment! And what countless blessings their work brought to the world, blessings that continue even up to our time!

Now if the apostles and their converts could do all of those things in the first century in spite of their being poor people and few in number, faced with extreme opposition and not having the New Testament in written form, think what we should be able to do today! We have the same Great Commission, to take the Gospel into all the world. True, there are more people to be taught, but today we have the numbers, the wealth, freedom of religion and freedom from persecution in most countries. We have the Bible in written form, and it has been translated into almost all of the languages of the world. We have radio, TV, videos, DVDs, cassette tapes, CDs, the phone, mobile phone, the computer, printers, literature and thousands of other things to help us to get the Lord’s message out to the world.

What more do we need, then, to take the Gospel to every soul, and to change the world into the kind of place that would be a blessing to all mankind? We need faith, the desire to obey the Lord, love for souls, the willingness to give of our money to send and to take the Gospel out to help our fellow man. We need zeal, courage, a desire to work and to use our abilities in carrying out the Lord's command. We need to quit being selfish, quit making excuses, quit being lazy, quit being materialistic, quit being worldly and immoral. Rather, we need to get up and go to work. We need to obey the Lord so that we might be saved in this world, and in the world to come, and to try to take as many with us as possible.

We can easily evangelize the world if we will only set our minds to the task, and continue to work until the job is done. The responsibility begins with you and me. **What am I doing? What are you doing?** What are we going to do? Let's go to work now, and continue until every soul has been taught. And let us so teach the next generation of Christians so that they will continue to evangelize the world generation after generation. If we will do that, the Lord will be with us every step of the way. [Brother J.C. Choate left this world on February 1, 2008 after a lingering, painful illness. Yet, J.C. speaks as it were from the grave (Hebrews 11:4), and very effectively respecting the only real job that our Lord gave his followers to do (Mark 16:15-16). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

By: J.C. Choate