

ULTIMATE EVANGELISM—A WELL OF LIVING WATER

By Paul Penno Jr.
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Before Robert Fulton's invention of the steamboat in 1803 and Stephenson's railway engine in 1825, vehicles had to be pulled by horses, mules, oxen, or donkeys—all of which needed to be whipped, kicked, or prodded into action, or shouted at. The world of that day marveled when it came time to see a self-propelled vehicle!

Is the gospel a self-propelled vehicle? Or does its proclamation and propagation depend on church members (and pastors!) constantly being prodded by church leaders into action? "Lay Activities" leaders in churches can testify: to get much done it takes constant "promotion" (the polite word for prodding, kicking, or whipping reluctant "livestock" into action). The zealous "promoter" gets some publicity for his enthusiasm, until finally "evangelism fatigue" sets in. Then a new leader must be found, and new programs, methods, systems, must be devised.

The New Testament letters of the apostles reveal a strange lack of such works "promotion." They chronicle amazing activity, but seldom if ever were believers prodded or whipped into action. Their zealous activity was simply assumed, it was natural. Their gospel was a "self-propelled vehicle." Why?

Their message had the power built-in. Nobody needed to be whipped into action. The motivating force was greater than that of a steam engine, for the power was implicit in the News about the sacrifice of the Son of God. He burst upon everyone's consciousness as "the Lamb of God," a blood-sacrifice offered by God. Examples: "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." "He is the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world," etc. The power was not magic, certainly not mysteriously

impossible for our day. The internal-combustion "engine" was the *agape* of Christ which "constrained" them (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

The Book of Revelation predicts that again such a self-propelling gospel will "lighten the earth with glory" (Rev. 18:1-4). And again the central character of interest will be "the Lamb of God"—mentioned 26 times in that Book alone. Does anybody "hunger and thirst" to understand the News more clearly?

Not long ago a survey was made by one denominational church to discover what each new convert cost in evangelism expense: around \$10,000. Many denominations are declining in membership. In North America attendance at worship services often declines, year by year; in Britain churches are being sold and remodeled into business offices or homes, monuments to evangelism failure.

In contrast, the gospel proclamation in New Testament times was phenomenal. The message went like fire in the dry stubble. Every new convert became an auto-mobile evangelist, himself/herself an effective conveyor of the message to others for the sheer love of it. For example, Paul writes to one church: "Not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. There is nothing then, that we need to say" (1 Thess. 1:7, 8, GNB). At Pentecost, the fire in the stubble was so great that 3000 were converted and baptized in one day. While it is true that many rejected that gospel, it met precisely the heart-needs of honest people who seemed to come out of the woodwork everywhere.

This stark historical reality is usually brushed off today as an unrepeatable phenomenon. "Times are different," it is said. But the Bible promises a last-days gospel proclamation even greater in scope and success than Pentecost. The earth is to be "lightened" with the glory of a message that will have within itself self-propagating power (Rev 18:1-4).

God's people 2000 years ago were not different than honest-hearted people today. The missing ingredient today is not human personality, or organizational efficiency. What is missing is the lost content of the message itself. The apostles' gospel was a self-propagating message because it

proclaimed Good News about the cross of Christ and what He accomplished by His sacrifice. The News itself “constrained” those who heard it and believed it. Time’s up; please read 2 Cor. 5:14-21, to get the point.

Everybody who believes the Bible teaching of the second coming of Jesus must also believe that something great must happen before He CAN come again: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and [only] then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). It is commonly understood that this means huge expenditures of money in public meetings and TV presentations using state of the art electronic facilities. Wonderful work; deserves our offerings. Huge public meetings have been held for nearly 200 years and yet world population grows faster than the combined efforts of all Protestant churches to reach them with “the gospel.”

Could it be that the Bible teaches a more effective method of “evangelism,” one that we have “in a great degree” overlooked?

It could be summed up in one statement Jesus made near the end of His ministry: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said [Song of Solomon 4:12-15], out of his inmost soul shall flow rivers of living water. . . . This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive” (John 7:37-39).

It means that the humblest person who “believes in Jesus,” even the uneducated, will become “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams of Lebanon.” Unconsciously, in an unstudied way, he will pour forth the ultimately powerful message. It will be that “the love of Christ constraineth us,” compels, motivates, empowers, makes effective the agent who cannot help but communicate the message—all with one proviso, that he “believe in Jesus.” That’s what Jesus said in John 7.

It sounds deceptively simple. For two millennia people have “believed in Jesus,” haven’t they? And yet in spite of all our best efforts, the task gets bigger all the time. There must be something about what it means to “believe in Jesus” that we haven’t yet grasped. If that “well of living water” is not flowing out from within our soul as the ultimate evangelism, it’s

obvious: we haven’t yet learned to “believe” in the sense that Jesus meant when He spoke on “that last day . . . of the feast.”

Could it be that there is a method of evangelism that we have “in a great degree” overlooked? Truly successful “evangelism” requires two criteria:

(a) Propagation of an “evangelistic” message by every method available, including TV and state of the art electronic productions.

(b) But the message itself must be correct, faithful to biblical revelation. Paul says that he is “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). The “power” is built-in within the message itself; “the truth of the gospel” is so dynamic that it is virtually self-propagating if it is freed of the confusion that Babylon’s “wine” produces. Jesus’s dictum is true: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Perhaps we haven’t realized how true those words are! The Lord said that if we can break through the clouds of confusion from “Babylon” that envelop His cross, we shall see great success in genuine, lasting soul-winning: “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all unto Me,” He promised.

Consistent with this promise is the prophetic account in Revelation 18—the coming time when the earth is to be “lightened with [the] glory” of the closing message. It will specifically be free of any confusion from “Babylon’s” “righteousness by faith” (vs. 3). Once the final message becomes clear, every honest-hearted human soul will heed the call to “come out of her [Babylon], My people” (vs. 4). It’s the gospel that’s “the power of God unto salvation,” not its accouterments. Once the humblest soul grasps what it means, his inmost soul becomes that “well of living waters” “springing up into everlasting life” refreshing all who come near him (Song of Solomon 4:15; John 4:14; 7:38).

The power won’t be in “the training of literary institutions” (though that can glorify God, too); it’s easy to say that it will be the Holy Spirit but that’s a cop-out if we forget that He “is the Spirit of truth,” and if we forget that that truth is “the truth of the gospel” (John 14:17; Gal. 2:5, 14). That’s where “the power” is.

What stands in our way? Jesus tells us: our “rich and increased with goods” evangelism pride (Rev. 3:17).

It happened suddenly—an example of how error from “Babylon” can twist, distort, confuse the gospel so that its “power” is nullified. A group of young people were studying the Bible. One was reading the text from a contemporary version of the Bible that by its title makes a special claim to being “clear.”

The topic was what Jesus says, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). The illustrative text was 2 Corinthians 5:14 for which the common version that has blessed us for centuries says, “The love of Christ constraineth us.” In other words, this powerful motivating “love” has its origin in Christ, a gift from Him.

But this confused modern version makes it say that our love for Christ constrains or motivates us! Thus in a subtle way “the truth of the gospel” is perverted into self-righteousness—it’s now “our love” from us that is so powerful. It was lethal error so subtle that it almost threw us.

Lukewarmness is a spiritual disease that afflicts God’s professed people worldwide. Like arsenic, a very small dose can paralyze spiritually. “The gospel” that Paul was “not ashamed” of was not mixed with any error from “Babylon” (Rom. 1:16). Being unmitigated, undiluted “truth,” it “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). We long to see that again!

In these last days, God’s urgent call is, “Come out of her, My people” (Rev. 18:1-4). We may physically remove ourselves from a community where error is taught instead of truth and think we’ve “come out of Babylon.” But we may still have “Babylon” (“confusion”) entrenched in our thinking and promulgated in our teaching of “the [supposed] gospel” due to a prevailing corporate pride (“thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” 3:17). We become blind, numb.

This tiny example of “clear” confusion is multiplied many times over among millions of sincere people who don’t realize that what they naively assume is “righteousness by faith” is often borrowed from a popular Christianity deeply rooted in apostasy from the truth. This infiltration of soul-

defiling confusion can be the most subtly clever that has plagued God’s people in all time.

Good News: we are promised that our heavenly Father will empty heaven of every angel to help even one honest soul who is alert enough to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (cf. Matt. 5:6). Let that one be you.

The greatest “evangelism” of all time was what happened at Pentecost. It was not emotionalism, and what brought the deep conviction of truth on people’s hearts was not the miracle of the apostles’ speaking foreign languages—a “sign and wonder” indeed, but not the real thing that did it: the apostles proclaimed what had happened when the Son of God died on His cross.

They didn’t “mince words,” or say it daintily. “*You* murdered the Prince of life, the Son of God!” They laid the guilt of the ages upon the souls of those Jews and Gentiles. There was no political making friends and influencing people, no attempt to make the message palatable, to “win” the top leaders by psychology. It was the most direct super-confrontation that has ever been between lowly people and religious society leadership (read it in Acts 2:23, 36; 4:10; 5:30, etc.).

Ordinary people like the apostles could never have galvanized themselves to tell it like they did had it not been for the ten days of repentance they spent beforehand. They had knelt very low in self-humiliation; what fools they had been! The Holy Spirit had 11 men in whom self had been “crucified with Christ.” This made it possible for the Son of God to be exalted in them.

Why was it the prototype of all genuine “evangelism”? What Jesus had said a short time earlier happened. It’s something that Jesus didn’t just “say” quietly to the Twelve. He “stood and cried in a loud voice” that everyone attending that “last and greatest day of the Feast” could hear, a message that was bursting forth from His soul. And it was a quotation from the Song of Solomon (S. S.) that said what He wanted to say, which He dignified by calling “THE Scripture.”

If you’re thirsty, He said, “come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within

him” (John 7:37, 38; S. S. 4:15; NIV, KJV). This is not a mere profession of “accepting Christ” like you enroll in an insurance policy; this is a thirsty soul famishing of inward dryness eagerly drinking every drop of spiritual moisture in a clearer grasp of gospel truth than he has ever before understood. The dry “gospel” has become life itself. Thus “believing” is defined: it’s not head knowledge, but the yearning in Jesus’ soul now transplanted into your soul.

You now actually love the Bible with the enthusiasm of your former worldly addictions—sports, dress, money, pleasure, appetite. You, poor little uneducated, untrained soul that you are, you have become a bubbling spring of fresh water of life. Everyone who rubs up against you in life is refreshed somehow by something you have said about “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14). Your heart has become a treasure store of gospel truth. You have become one of those “144,000” whose passion is to “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:5).

This becomes a clearer definition of what it means to “believe.” It’s self-humbling; you want to pray that although “I believe,” yet “help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24). You’re hesitant now to boast of your so-called “faith.” Like Moses, you’re not even aware that your face is shining (cf. Ex. 34:29).

This is “evangelism” in God’s design. It’s ordinary people not necessarily “trained in literary institutions” who bubble over humbly with pure gospel truth that has satisfied their own soul thirst.

This young man came running up to Jesus almost out of breath: “What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” A wonderful new-convert-to-be! Jesus caught his word “do,” and proceeded to give him a thoroughly legalist answer: “Keep the commandments,” and He cited the Ten. On the surface, His answer thrills legalists today.

The young man was fishing for more: he told Jesus he had done everything specified since he was a child. “What do I still lack?” What he meant was, he wanted to achieve perfection—the goal of every legalist.

Then Jesus zeroes in on the real thing: “If you want to be perfect, sell what you have and give to the poor.” Don’t think He wanted to discourage the youth: “you will have treasure in heaven.” That should satisfy any acquisitive nature cultivated “from. . . youth.” But Jesus couldn’t do any

“evangelism” without telling about the cross: “And come, follow Me” (Matt. 19:16-22). The youth could have had first chance at becoming an Apostle Paul!

But the poor fellow had a terrific problem. It was worse than leprosy or being blind. He was rich, “he had great possessions.” So he walked away. Jesus later conceded to the disciples: “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” Then He repeated it with a slight difference—“who trust in riches!” (Mark 10:23-25).

He appears to contradict what He said in Matthew 11 about His yoke being “easy” and His burden “light” (28-30; again legalists may be delighted for they don’t like that “easy” or “light” idea). If you are rich (and everybody who gets this message is, in some way), you can solve your problem by confessing that you don’t deserve a whit of the “wealth” you possess: what is your right is that second death that Jesus died in your place, and for you.

In a discussion some young people got hung up on a question about an unknown boy. His unknown mother had baked him five little barley loaves, and cooked two small fishes, all to be his lunch. Whatever fun outing he had planned that day, he went instead to hear Jesus preach. That showed some faith, didn’t it?

At the meeting, his interest was such that he came down near the front and apparently mingled with the Twelve. Hungry late in the day, he wanted to eat his lunch as much as anybody, but he heard Jesus tell the Twelve to feed the people, 5000. He heard the apostles bewail their lack of food, and childlike in his gladsome enthusiasm told Andrew that he would give his lunch to Jesus. That showed a commendable denial of self for a hungry boy, didn’t it? Was he motivated by the love of Christ? Was he helping Jesus, or only as a 2-year old “helps” you sweep the floor? (John 6:1-11.)

Jesus accepted the little boy’s sacrifice, thanked His Father for the pitifully little gift in His hands, prayed for His blessing upon it, and forthwith fed the 5000 with its multiplied bounty.

Now for the question: did He need that little boy’s sacrificial lunch? If the child had refused to give it, could Jesus have fed that multitude?

Thereupon the discussion was split. Most said, "Yes, He could have brought manna down from heaven!" Someone asked, "Suppose we individually refuse to do our duty in telling the world the gospel message, can the Lord use someone else?" "Yes," was the immediate response; "He'll use the angels; they'll finish the work!"

That sounds like a dangerous cop-out. Why bother to answer the Holy Spirit's convictions of duty? Reach for your remote and flip on the TV. The angels will finish God's work!

The Lord Jesus needed that little boy's gift of his lunch. Yes, He could have brought down manna from heaven, but He would not any more than He would change those stones in the wilderness into bread (Matt. 4). That little boy was tremendously important that day. Jesus really did need Him. The conclusion of course is, He really needs you, too; if you cop out, someone will be lost. Is that wrong?