



Calling Others to Join the Walk

Sermon – Aiden Sibrava
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Today we're thinking about 'evangelism', or to use the metaphor of this series, 'inviting others to join the walk'. So first we'll think about evangelism broadly and then we'll conclude with some thoughts from the Scriptures.

But to start us thinking about evangelism, I want to tell you about the worst job I ever had. It was straight out of high school and I had it for one week. The job was...telemarketing. *Boo! Yuck!* And let me tell you, it was every bit as bad as you think it is. I mean, you know how awful it is to be on the receiving end of a telemarketer's call, but let me tell you it's not much more fun being the one making the call.

The deal was that I was working for this company and, because government regulation creates all sorts of loopholes that 'shrewd dealers' can take advantage of, this was happening: Telstra wasn't allowed to have a 'monopoly.' Because they weren't allowed to have a monopoly, they had to sell some of their service at wholesale to other companies, who could then re-sell the service. So, of course, what you got were these kind of parasite companies which sprung up, which didn't actually add any value to customers. But because they'd been given this wholesale rate from Telstra, they could then sell that service on for *slightly* less than what it would cost the end customer to go with Telstra directly. Of course, you can imagine there's no end of issues with that...because it's a fly-by-night dealer who are only in it for skimming the cream, not for customer satisfaction.

I cottoned on to all this very fast as someone who's selling the service and so of course it's just... *Ugh...* It's like trying to sell ice to the Inuit. You think, *why would you buy this?* And even if you do like the rate that you're offered, why wouldn't you then go back to Telstra and say "Hey—guess what? This is what you're charging me next quarter..." And just stay with them? Because they're the ones who actually deliver the service!

I mean you can see how the whole thing is a bad sell, right? And I couldn't do it! I lasted a week before I moved onto other things.

You know, I tell this story because I think that, *at times*, sharing the Gospel can *feel* a little bit like telemarketing. It *shouldn't*—but it can. And it's worth asking, why?

I mean some people just *love* cold-turkey evangelism. They can turn any conversation towards Jesus, there's no social stigmas or hang ups around any of this...but for other people, they really, really struggle.

Why is that?

Well I think it's worth drawing a comparison of what makes it hard to telemarket, and how evangelism can feel hard if it looks like that in some ways. What makes telemarketing so hard is:

i. Lack of relationship. You're cold-calling me, so why should I care? And it's worthwhile asking, do we lack relationship with the people we're trying to reach for Jesus? Are we really in their lives, do we really care for them? It's not a prerequisite for sharing the gospel, but it makes it much less likely to have the phone slammed back on the hook, right? Do we have a relationship? *Telemarketers don't*. Jesus was criticised as a '*friend of sinners*', and he said, "*It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*"

I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17) So he had a relationship. Do we?

ii. Another thing that makes it hard to telemarket is lack of confidence in the product. Do we ever lack confidence in the gospel? We know we *shouldn't*, but sometimes we struggle, don't we? When you've had some hard knocks in life, the fast answers that you're kind of OK with when you're 22, they don't hold up in the same way once you've got 30, 40 or 50 years behind you. So are you confident? If you're not, faith can feel like a hard sell to our-*selves*, let alone others.

iii. Or what about another issue with telemarketers... the issue of *credibility*? That's a big one, right? Think back to my story and Telstra? They have *credibility*. I mean, like, *relatively speaking*, right? But they're the ones who deliver the service. They've got the linesmen, they do the work, they've got the towers... They have *credibility*. But the dodgy product I was trying to hawk? *No credibility*.

And what about church? I mean I don't want to get into the details but think of some of the stuff that American evangelicals have turned a blind eye to throughout the years... And then realise we have plenty of logs in our own eyes... And you can see how people might struggle with credibility. (Maybe not with Jesus, but the church at least...) Remember in John 13, Jesus says that people will know we're his disciples by our love—so it's worth asking, do we have credibility in that?

iv. And one last issue with telemarketing is that it feels scripted. It is scripted! There's a certain set of 'gates' that, if I can get a customer through, then I've got 'em. And evangelism can feel that way, can't it. It can be like, we've just got to get through

these steps in 2 Ways To Live, or The Way of the Master, or whichever *formula* you've learned, and if I go *tick, tick, tick, tick* on those gates, then *boom!* I've got 'em. And in a culture which craves authenticity, I'm not super comfortable with that. Because it feels like 'the hard sell', doesn't it?

And it's not what Jesus' evangelism looked like, is it? You know, more often than not, rather than throw answers at people, he'd throw questions at them! He didn't sell, he invited them to *search*. You know, like: 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'... He says: '*Why do you call me 'good'? No one is good except God...*'

Jesus has this way...rather than just answering everything, he'll push back on where people are coming from, and all of a sudden, rather than getting something they can just say 'yes' or 'no' to, they're suddenly *engaged*. They're kind of *pulled into* this sort of conversation around Jesus... I mean, why don't we do that? We don't *have* to have some kind of *knock-'em-down* script; Jesus didn't have a script... And that was OK for Jesus... So why can't it be OK for us?

I guess what I'm saying is, we've got to think about the way that we share the gospel. And we've got to share it in a way that is credible, that's faithful, that's not formulaic but that engages with people as they are, because *we are not telemarketers!* And neither was Jesus.

So there's four things worth thinking about in evangelism; four ways it can be hard:

- i. Lack of relationship.
- ii. Lack of confidence.

iii. Lack of credibility.

iv. The script.

But it doesn't have to be that way. So if I can urge you to think about how we address those things... Look, it's worth a sermon series; but it's worth thinking about. Because we have *every reason* to be confident in what we have as Christians and to cheerfully share it...and yet so often we're not and we don't. Why is that? Why is that... There's so much in this.

We've only got a certain amount of time... So let's talk about one of those things real quick, OK? Let's talk about *confidence*. I think one of the key things about having 'confidence in the product' is knowing what to expect of it. And I think one of the things that will actually mobilise us for evangelism is understanding what can go on when we share the gospel...when we invite others to 'join the road'.

So I want to take you to Jude, because it's one of my favourite passages. Jude is fantastic. It talks about sharing the gospel in the light of false teachers and afflictions and trials...but it also talks about what it could *look like* to share the gospel. And it says it could look like three different things. There's three different ways that sharing the gospel could look. So let's think about those now.

Jude 22 says, *"Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh."*

I want to suggest that in those verses, we're given three different ways that evangelism could look. There's three!

First of all, we're told to have mercy on those who doubt... Number 1, have mercy on those who doubt. You know, before we talked about 'gospel credibility'. And I think that when our credibility is low, there are a lot of relatively 'good people' who *would be* compelled by the narrative of Christianity, but they *doubt*. They hear about Jesus and how wonderful he is, but then they look at the church and go... '*A*' *doesn't connect to* '*B*'. They doubt. And here, Jude, the brother of Jesus, tells us to have mercy on those who...*doubt*. We're called to a posture of Christian living that's humble and merciful. That's number 1 - we're told to have *mercy* on those who doubt.

Number 2 though, the next way that people might respond to the gospel, we're told to "*save others by snatching them from the fire.*" Now I can bring an informed perspective to this, right? Saving people from the fire is a dramatic, cataclysmic moment. When somebody is stuck in a house that's on fire, it's very likely they will die very quickly. It is a complete emergency. Fire is a major emergency and we're told in Jude that there will be times when we share the gospel and it's like that. We're going to save some by snatching them from the fire. Now that's not every day... it's more like end of life ministry, or that moment when you get to pray over somebody who's on the edge...or that moment when somebody is awakened and turned by the Spirit of God and they see their great sin and the gravity of judgement, and they cry out, *how must I be saved? What can I do?* And you're able to speak the comforting word of the gospel into that acute moment. It's not every day. But, they're awesome moments when we get to experience them. That's the second way it could look.

And the third way is, verse 23, "*to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*" It's

interesting that again, we're called to show mercy, or comfort. But it's interesting because this group of people aren't just "*those who doubt*", these are like...if the second way is like firefighting, this is like HAZMAT. Hazardous materials. Jude uses this language of '*hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh*'. And if he's following Paul in Paul's use of corrupted flesh, he's talking about grave sin, the kind that contaminates your soul, your psyche. It's like it's a danger to the person you're ministering to and also for you. Think about people who've ministered in dark places and the temptation that must be there to be corrupted... Jude says you're to show *mercy*, mixed with *fear*. And I think it's a fear of God as much as it's a fear of anything that might result from being around them.

And you know it's interesting, as we look at those three ways people might respond, only *one* of them is like a really sudden, definitive 'saving' - Number 2. Either side of that, with the 'good people' who doubt and the filthy - the ones who've contaminated their lives - we're to show *mercy*.

Jude doesn't say you'll always suddenly save them, he says, "*show mercy.*"

So he's not setting us up with an expectation that sharing the gospel will always be victory-on-victory. I mean sometimes it will be... You know like when the person is stuck in their burning house and you're the one breaking down the door and dragging them out - they will *love you*. And it happens. It can happen in the Christian life, but it's not every day. Other times it's a process. They doubt. Or they're stuck in sin. And we're called to show *mercy* to those people. So don't expect victory-on-victory because sometimes it's hard. Sometimes it takes grit.

And I think that prepares us for sharing the gospel with confidence, knowing that it's not always going to be amazing. And that doesn't make you a failure. It just makes you a *disciple*.

So there you go. We've just scratched the surface of a major topic. We've seen four ways that sharing the gospel can feel like telemarketing and why it shouldn't. And we've thought about our expectations around this. So what else do we need to get out there and do it? Do we need the guilt trip - like, we're supposed to be sharing the gospel so why aren't you? I don't think that's a great motivator.

But you know what is? It's the reminder that we have the message that can save from the fire. And while some people face 'the fire' early in life when there's lots of life left to live, others live a charmed life. But one way or another everyone comes to the point where they face the fire in some way. And the gospel message is a saving message—

The death of Jesus, it's a bit like this:

In my RFS manual, it says that if a wildfire is coming at me, one of the places I can take shelter is in the burned ground. Ground that's already burned won't burn again. And that's who Jesus is; that's what trusting him means. He died for us...died for our sin... so that when we're in him, we can be safe on the day of the Lord. The day when evil is done away with.

And that's great news... so why not get out and share it?