

EVANGELISM.

INTRODUCTION. “He that winneth souls is wise”, Proverbs 11.30. The inference is that it is a wise thing to be involved in soul-winning. Some translations say, “He that is wise winneth souls”, and the inference is that it takes wisdom to do it. Both things are true. However, while we speak about soul-winning, we all know that it is God who saves. Our business is to evangelise. It is a prime responsibility of the Christian life. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”, Mark 16.15. We sow the Seed; it takes God to give a harvest. The world is your parish and every soul is seen as a candidate for God’s salvation. Manuals on evangelism abound: text books about methods are legion: as in every other aspect of Christian living, the Word of God is the only safe source of guidance.

Basically, New Testament evangelism falls into two categories, **Public Preaching** and **Personal Witnessing**. Note the areas of common ground.

- **The Content of the Message.** In public preaching, Paul’s message at Corinth was, “Jesus Christ and him crucified”, 1 Cor.2.2. In personal witnessing, Philip “preached unto him Jesus”, Acts 8.35, (based on the sufferings of Christ as explained in Isaiah 53). It is so important for everyone involved in evangelism to be totally familiar with the message that they communicate, whether publicly or privately. Basically, it is all about Christ, and the message is expounded in depth in the Epistle to the Romans. Knowledge of Romans is a must for every believer.
- **The Character of the Messenger.** With a background of public preaching, Paul said, “ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake”, 1 Thess.1.5, (developed in vv.1-12 of chapter 2). Philip, the personal witness, was a man of “honest report etc.”, Acts 6.3,5. If you behave badly, and are a poor reflection on Christianity, your mouth is closed as far as witnessing is concerned. Holy living, honest behaviour, and a Christ-like spirit all commend the Gospel that you preach, Phil.1.27.

PUBLIC PREACHING.

a. Venues.

- 1) Open-air preaching was a feature of Paul’s missionary travels throughout the Acts of the Apostles. The meeting at Mars Hill in Athens was memorable (Acts 17).
- 2) The Jewish synagogue was often his first port of call with the Gospel in any new location, for the Gospel was for “the Jew first”, Rom. 1.16. These were centres where the Scriptures were read etc. Perhaps it illustrates that it is legitimate to convene meetings for Gospel preaching in our own premises.
- 3) In Acts 19, at Ephesus Paul used a school for preaching, and had a Gospel series for two years with meetings every day! Presumably the premises were rented, but there is a scriptural precedent there for using schools or other rented accommodation for Gospel preaching.
- 4) When the Gospel was first preached to a Gentile audience, the venue was the home of Cornelius (Acts 10). So the homes of believers or unbelievers can be used for the preaching of the Word.

b. **Methods.** Several words are used to describe how preaching was conducted.

- 1) There is a word which means to announce or proclaim, for example Acts 13.5.
- 2) There is the word which means to preach the Good News, the word from which we derive our English word *evangelise*. See Acts 11.20 Never forget that the message is basically the good news about the Lord Jesus.
- 3) There is the word that means to proclaim as a herald, e.g. 1 Corinthians 1.23. A herald's responsibility was just to state his message as it had been committed to him.
- 4) On occasions you find Paul "reasoning", e.g. Acts 17.2. There may be occasions when debate and discussion can be profitable.

PERSONAL WITNESSING. In addition to the words for preaching which are cited above, another very common word is used, and it is the ordinary word for speaking (*laleo*). It is used both of public preaching and personal witnessing. For example, scattered believers spoke the Word at Antioch, Acts 11.19. The apostles were not among them, ch.8.1, so the lesson is that it is the responsibility of every believer, brothers and sisters, to speak to others in a personal way: it is not the sole responsibility of preachers and leaders.

Opportunities for Witnessing Personally.

- 1) When others make an approach to you, e.g. Nicodemus coming to the Lord Jesus by night, John 3. "Be ready always to give an answer" 1 Peter 3.15.
- 2) You can take the initiative to speak to others, e.g. the Lord's approach to the woman at the well in John 4. Philip was sensitive to the Spirit's guidance as far as this aspect of personal evangelism was concerned, Acts 8.26-40.
- 3) Personal Witnessing can be carried out in the more formal home to home evangelism, Acts 20.20-21.
- 4) People can be contacted just where they congregate, Acts 16.13.
- 5) Family members and friends can be spoken to, John 1.41,45.
- 6) Unusually adverse circumstances can provide opportunities for speaking for Christ, Phil.1.12-13.

CONCLUSION. Even at this late hour of the age of grace, the work of spreading the Gospel must be maintained in the New Testament fashion. We must be alert to opportunities both for public preaching, perhaps even in an impromptu fashion as in Acts 2, and also for personal witnessing. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season", 2 Tim.4.2.