

“WORDS ARE NECESSARY”

Romans 10: 11-15

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Being a good salesperson? Over the years, I have been told that I am like a salesman. These individuals tell me that I am selling a product just like your typical salesman sells their product. They say that similar to a salesman, I try to persuade people towards my product because that is my job.

Yes, there is some truth in this. I am speaking to you from the pulpit to try to persuade you to follow Jesus more closely in your daily life. I believe in my product, but I prefer not to call it a product, but a relationship – I would like you to see that what I am selling is a close friendship with God. I am doing this as my profession because I believe it makes all the difference in the world. My product is the Good News of Jesus, and I believe it will not only change your life, but will continue to change your life if you allow it to. The Good News is a gift to you. Like any gift, you do not need to buy it, but only accept it - and it is yours. As Christian we are all called to tell others about the Good News, so that they are aware of this Good News. If we do not tell them, we are withholding a great gift that is free to them. How do we go about telling others about Jesus in today's society?

Modern verses Postmodern: Since about the 1980's, our cultural context has changed. We have moved more from a modern society to a post-modern society. The modern era could be dated from 1500 to about 1970. At that time it was believed that reason was the answer to everything. Around the 16th Century the printing press was invented; science became popular and the Protestant Reformation took place (2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation). The modernist believed that human reason/logic and technology would solve the problems of the world. Literacy rates also began to rise at that time and the primary way of communication was through the written page. Modern thinking was logic oriented. In this modern context, evangelism was geared more to proving the existence of God, and persuading others to accept this logic, over against the faulty logic of not believing.

Postmodern cultural thinking was a reaction to Modernist thinking. The Postmodern movement can typically be described as an attitude of skepticism towards traditional theories, ideologies and rational thought brought about through the Enlightenment era. In our post-modern era, people are more skeptical about claims of truth, partly because they hear it from so different voices in our pluralistic society. A stronger focus on individualism and individual freedom is a characteristic of a post-modern society. Furthermore, the authority of the Bible is not accepted as it was in the modern era. The 'fire and brimstone – in your face evangelism' is definitely not tolerated today as it once was. This kind of evangelism equates Christians as 'pushy salespeople'!

Evangelism has changed from more of a perspective of being right (we have the right product) – to more of a perspective of service to others, and relationships. Thus, evangelism is more about relationships than a formulaic program of getting people to sign up. I believe the new approach to evangelism is more in line with Christ because it is built on a personal relationship with Christ. Christians are to love their neighbours and build relationships with them, and at the same time encouraging their neighbours to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

The Good News begins and ends with 'Grace'. The author of our scripture reading, Paul, describes this Good News of the Gospel in Romans 10: 11-15. He begins by saying that no one will be put to shame. In other words, regardless of whom you are, or your position in life, your identity is as a loved child of God – regardless! Paul was getting some push-back from those who could not accept the inclusiveness of the Gospel.

Therefore Paul said that regardless of your ethnic background, everyone is equal. Anyone who calls on God for help receives his free gift of salvation! It is not what you do or your ethnic background that matters. Accept the free gift of God's grace in Jesus and it will be yours!

Words are necessary. Paul goes on to say that people need to know about this Good News before they can accept it. They need to hear about it - words are necessary! Who is going to tell them – the other guy? Paul is stating the obvious without saying it. You are the one to tell others! But, I am not good at it you say! Never mind, you are sent by God! The Holy Spirit works through you - you do not need to worry about the right words. Remember Moses? He said he could not speak, yet God provided Aaron his brother to speak for him. We have the Holy Spirit regardless of how inept we may feel about speaking the Good News.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is his promise to be with you in the person of the Holy Spirit and never leave you. What is better than that? We all wrestle to various degrees to stay strong in connection with our creator, savior and sustainer in life. Our tendency is to slip back into a life of self-preservation. Our relationship with Jesus gives us freedom from focusing on and worrying about ourselves. Rather, when we focus on knowing Jesus and his love, we will walk with him through life, death and into eternity! This relationship of love in Christ never ends. When we experience the comfort and strength of that relationship we will want others to have that experience too. We will want others to know that Good News!

Somehow, so many Christian have developed a 'conspiracy of silence'. In other words, there is almost an unwritten law not to speak about your faith. It has something to do with not offending others with 'religious talk'. Consider the situation where people we know are struggling with something heavy in their lives and they need more than anything else a word of comfort and even a prayer. I think too often with our family and friends we are so hesitant to speak a word of Good News for fear of offending, that we have missed a wonderful opportunity for healing.

Beautiful feet: God has called our feet beautiful because the action of sharing the Good News is beautiful (Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10: 15). We all have had good news that we wanted to share. We all love to do it! Though we have The Good News, one cannot easily persuade another into faith in Christ – especially in our post-modern context. However, we can tell them what we experience and what we know. Consider this story:

Tony Campolo tells the story of when he was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania and he taught two students who were headed to graduate school at Cornell University. This was in the 1960's and a time when Marxist philosophy was in high gear. The one student was a Marxist and was by far the most brilliant student Campolo has ever had. The other was of average intelligence and was a young Christian who attended a Bible Study that Tony Campolo led. When Campolo heard that these two were planning to share an apartment, he was dismayed because he knew the Marxist Student could out-argue the young Christian in any subject. Campolo was wondering how long it would take for the Marxist to argue the Christian out of his faith.

Tony said that when he met these two students, months later, he heard that the Marxist had become a Christian. Out of curiosity, Campolo asked how this could happen. He was worried that both would end up as Marxists in a couple of months. The former Marxist said that every night he would explain how the Christians assumptions were ungrounded, and point out the validity of the Marxist ideology. Each night they would debate and argue, and every time the Marxist won the argument. But, the young Christian would end up saying something like this: "Mark, you have overpowered me with your arguments, but you did not convince me that you are right. You cannot convince me that you are right because I know that Jesus is real. I feel him in my life and I sense his presence every day. I have a personal relationship with him that cannot be questioned." In the end, a solid relationship with Jesus is the strongest witness anyone can have for the Kingdom of God. That is beautiful! Amen.