



from the desk of . . .
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Sharing The Gospel - 3

CHANGE OF HEART

Luke 18:18-23

I 1st learned about Louis Zamperini (X) 30 years ago. He immediately became a modern-day hero to me. As a result, when Laura Hillenbrand wrote a biography, "Unbroken", (X) about him in 2010, & Angelina Jolie produced a movie based on the book in 2014, I was excited. But the movie stopped at the most important part of this man's remarkable life.

Now I mustn't have been the only one who felt that way, because in October a sequel will be released, (X) "Unbroken, Path To Redemption."

Now for those of you who don't know about this amazing man, here's a brief synopsis. In the 1930's he was an Olympic runner. (X) Everybody thought that he'd be the 1st person to break the 4-minute mile.

But then WWII interrupted his track career.

Louis joined the Air Force & became a bombardier; & in April 1942 his plane went down in the Pacific. All the crew was killed, except for Louis & 2 of his buddies.

They spent the next 47 days on a life raft, existing on rain water & raw fish. They had to fend off sharks, & constant storms threatened to capsize them.

After 32 days one of his buddies died.

Japanese planes would spot them & shower them with bullets. Louis & his buddy would dive deep into the water waiting for the planes to leave, & then surface to patch their punctured raft.

Eventually their little raft drifted 2,000 miles to land.

Unfortunately, it was Japanese occupied.

So, Louis spent the next 2 years in a P.O.W. camp, where he was routinely beaten & tortured & starved.

But he clung to life, & at the end of the war returned home to CA, & got married. And that's basically where the 1st movie ends. Louis, however, struggled with the memories of all that happened to him, & turned to alcohol as a way to deal with it. And it wasn't long before his life & marriage began to unravel.

Then one day in 1949 a 31-year-old evangelist, named Billy Graham came to L.A. (X) & set up a big tent with 1,000's of chairs ... with the hope that people would come.

Crowds did come, overflow crowds. And one day Zamperini's wife, Cynthia, said, "Louis, I think we ought to go hear this Billy Graham guy." He didn't want to, but finally, at Cynthia's insistence ... he agreed.

Billy talked about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And at the end of his sermon extended an invitation. "If this is what you want for your life,
I want you to stand up & come forward."

Louis jumped to his feet & stepped into the aisle, not to go forward ... but to bolt out the back of the tent.

But as he stood in the aisle, something happened.
All of a sudden, his heart changed.

He recalled a promise he'd made back on the life raft that if God would save him he'd serve Him the rest of his life. (X) So, he did an about-face, marched to the front of the tent, & surrendered his life to Jesus.

Now the reason I'm telling you this is because we're going to focus today on what brings about a change of heart in a person toward God. When Louis stepped into the aisle in Billy Graham's tent he had no intention of going forward ... but in an instant ... his heart changed.

We're in the final week of a 3-part series entitled, "Sharing The Gospel." We've been talking about how spiritually lost people get found.

We all started out spiritually lost. Isaiah writes, (X)
"All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way." (Isaiah 53:6)

But thankfully, for many of us ... we were found.
We heard & received the Good News about Jesus.

We put our trust in Him for forgiveness. He became our Savior & Lord. And now our heart's desire, as His follower, is to see our friends & family members get "found". So, how does that happen? ...

We've talked about open doors, open mouths, & this morning, open hearts. "Open doors" refers to the **opportunities** we create in our day-to-day relationships to have spiritual conversations.

An "open mouth" deals with the **boldness** to speak up & present the *Good News* about Jesus.

And an "open heart" answers the question ...
"is there something I can do to increase the likelihood that the person listening to me will be receptive?"

And the answer to that is a resounding ... "yes."

And that's what we're going to look at today ...
ways to open up our friends' hearts to the *Gospel*.

Our role model throughout these messages has been Jesus Himself. When we talked about "open doors" we looked at Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus. And, last week, with "open mouths" it was Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. And today, as we consider open hearts, we'll be looking at a man who is actually nameless.

Nevertheless, it's a story that's told in 3 of the 4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, & Luke.

Let me explain why I chose this particular story.

It's not what we'd call a success story. In fact, when Jesus finishes talking, the man turns & walks away rejecting the offer of eternal life.

I've chosen this because I want you to see that even Jesus, who promised to "teach us to catch people" (Matthew 4:19) didn't catch every "fish" in the lake ... some got away.

And I'm telling you that up front because I know some of us are afraid to talk about God with others because we think that the worst that could happen is that they'll turn us off & walk away. Well, that's not the worst that can happen ... it happened to Jesus.

The worst that can happen is for us to be quiet & say nothing; for us to keep the Gospel to ourselves.

Now, with that in mind, listen to Good News from Luke, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M. Within your hearing now comes the Word of the Lord ...

A Jewish leader asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery; do not commit murder; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; respect your father and your mother.'

The man replied, "Ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments."

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one more thing you need to do. Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me." But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich. (Luke 18:18-23)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

Let's look at 4 ways to open the hearts of others to the Good News about Jesus. #1 ... **refer** to God's Laws.

Years ago, when I 1st really thought about this story, I was surprised at Jesus' response to this man. ... Think about it. This fellow shows up & asks, "What must I do to receive eternal life?" There's an "open door" that we can drive a truck through. And what's Jesus' response? ... He recites 5 Commandments to him.

What does that imply? ... (*we get to Heaven by obedience*) We do the things that God says to do; we don't do the things that God says not to do. We achieve eternal life by being good. ... But we know that this isn't consistent with the rest of Scripture, right? ...

Scripture teaches that we can never do enough good things to get into Heaven. (Romans 3:23)

So, how do we get eternal life? ... We receive it as a free gift. We put our trust in Jesus, & what He did for us on the cross. He paid the debt for our sins,

so that we could receive forgiveness as a gift. (X)

It's not something that we can earn.

Scripture teaches this all over the place.

"Sin pays its wage - death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

"It is by God's grace that we have been saved through faith. It is not the result of our own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

"If we confess that Jesus is Lord & believe that God raised him from death, we will be saved." (Romans 10:9)

Okay, if we receive eternal life by putting our trust in Jesus as Savior & Lord, then why, why, why does He answer this guy's question by reciting 5 of God's Laws? Why doesn't Jesus just say, "You want to know how to receive eternal life? Believe in me."

Well, here's the answer ... people don't generally put their trust in Jesus for salvation until they **realize their need for Him**.

Let me give you an analogy here. Somewhere between when I went to school & when kids go to school today, we've picked up the habit of having our children sell things to people ... to pay for certain programs.

My kids had to do this. Your kids had/have to do this. They go to friends, family members, & neighbors & try to sell things to us that we don't need, or could buy at the store for a lot less.

Once or twice a year the boy who lives across the street comes to our door & sells us popcorn for \$20 ... & we hardly ever eat popcorn. I could go to the Jewel & get 3 times as much for that \$20. But we buy the stuff we don't need because we know the kids. (Poor little Johnny is trying to raise money for concert band, etc.)

We often get that same feeling when we're talking to spiritually disinterested people about Jesus. They really don't sense a need for Him. They'd prefer us to just move on. And if they do engage in a conversation about spiritual matters, it's only to humor us.

How do we get people interested in Jesus Christ? ...
By helping them see their need for a Savior.

How do we do that? ... By bringing them to the realization that they're spiritually lost sinners.

But how do we do that? ... By referring to God's Laws.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way. (X) "No one is put right in God's sight by doing what the Law requires; what the Law does is to make us know that we have sinned."

(Romans 3:20) The Law is like a mirror revealing our sin to us. That's why Jesus answers this Jewish leader as He does.

By the way, I'm tired of referring to him as "this guy" or "this man". Let's give him a name. What should we call him? ... _____, that's a good Biblical name!

Okay, how many of God's Laws does Jesus recite to _____? ... (5) And they all come from the top 10. There are 100's of Laws in the O.T., but these 5 are from the 10 Commandments. In case you're curious, Jesus recites #'s 7,6,8,9, & 5 to him.

Okay, does _____ realize that he's a spiritually lost sinner when Jesus finishes referring to God's Laws? ... No. As Jesus recites these Laws, _____ responds, "☑ ... ☑ ... ☑ ... ☑ ... ☑ ... I'm good ... anything else?"

_____ actually thinks he's perfectly obeying God's commands. But instead of laughing in his face, Jesus presents one more Commandment. Now He doesn't say it directly, as it's recorded in Exodus 20. But He does present it in such a way that _____ can't miss it.

"Go sell everything & give the proceeds to the poor." What Commandment do you think Jesus is thinking about? ... Commandment #1 ... "Worship no god but me."

(Exodus 20:3)

Jesus is asking _____, "What do you love most? Do you love your stuff, or do you love God? What's really your god? Is it your material possessions? Or could you walk away from them?" ... Jesus puts His finger on the Commandment that _____ was guilty of breaking.

He wanted him to see that he was a spiritually lost sinner who needed a Savior. (The Acts 5:31)

Let me point out something interesting here.

When _____ 1st greets Jesus, notice his salutation.

"Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?"

(By the way, nobody used the adjective "good" in addressing someone else. "Good" was reserved for God.)

Jesus' response ... "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Here we have 3 "goods" in 3 short sentences. What's Jesus saying? Is He admitting that He's not good? Or that He's not God? ...

Of course not. Jesus is simply saying that you & I don't get to determine what "good" is. "Good" is something that only a perfectly holy God can **define**.

People, on their own, rarely figure out that they're bad, because we have our own evaluation standards. ... "I'm a pretty decent person." As a result, it's difficult for us to recognize or accept the fact that we're lost sinners in need of a Savior. It's **God's Laws** that help us reach this conclusion. (Romans 7:7)

So, what you need to do then is go to your friends & neighbors & recite the 10 Commandments to them! ...

(Not really, just want to see if you're listening.)

Let me give you the same advice that I gave you 2 weeks ago.

When we get around to having spiritual conversations with people, don't use the 2nd person pronoun, use the 1st person pronoun. Don't say ... "You're a lost sinner & without Christ you're going to Hell."

Use the 1st person pronoun. "There came a time in my life when I realized that my sin had separated me from a holy God. And somebody told me that Jesus died on a cross for me. And all of a sudden it made sense.

So, I got on my knees, & I put my trust in Him."

Nobody can argue with your experience. The same is true when referring to God's Laws. Don't say ...

"You've broken this Commandment & this one & this one."

Talk about the Commandments that you've broken, that led to your realization that you're hopelessly lost & in need of a Savior. (2 Corinthians 5:19)

"I was raised in a Christian home & I was never into any really 'bad' sin. When I came to faith in Jesus, I wasn't coming from a background of being on drugs, or a thief, or a jailbird, or anything like that. But ... (& here's where the Commandments enter the story), before I came to faith, I was guilty of ... self-centeredness. My life was all about me. I used friends for my own ends. Then one day I came to the realization that I had been breaking God's commands.

"Jesus was once asked
what the greatest Commandment was.

"And He replied, (X) 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, & with all your strength.' And then, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' (Mark 12:30-31) And I didn't love other people like I loved me. I basically loved me 1st.

My god was me. And I realized that I needed a Savior."

Do you see how this works? ...

We can get a lot of preaching done without the other person feeling like we're preaching at them.

God's Commandment (X) "Do not commit murder." (Exodus 20:13) And Jesus adds, "if you are angry with your brother or sister," or "call them good-for-nothing" or "a worthless fool" (Matthew 5:22) ... you are a murderer.

Well, I had done that. I had broken God's 6th command.

(X) Jesus said that if I look at a woman & want to possess her I'm guilty of committing adultery. (Matthew 5:28) And I realized that I had broken the 7th Commandment.

(Exodus 20:14) I was a sinner who needed a Savior.

You see, most of us, when we think about spiritual conversations, want to talk about the benefits of putting our faith in Jesus.

We want to convince people that if they trust Christ, He'll rebuild their marriage, He'll transform their character, He'll answer their prayers, He'll provide a purpose in life, He'll give them whiter teeth & fresher breath. The list goes on & on. But that's superficial.

Without God's Laws, people won't recognize **why** they need a **Savior** ... & until they understand that, it's unlikely that they'll experience a heart change for Christ.

Now I spent a lot time on this 1st point, so if you're looking at your watch & seeing we have 3 points to go, & thinking, "we'll be here for another hour" ... you're right!

#2 ... **identify** the sticky point. Scripture records that _____ "was very rich." And when Jesus put His finger on that wealth, & helped _____ to see that riches was his real god, _____ turned & walked away.

He wanted his stuff more than he wanted Jesus.

We need to help people identify whatever it is that's keeping them from putting their full trust in Jesus.

People have all kinds of **reasons** for **choosing** not to follow Jesus. Some choose to not follow Him because they're hanging on to bitterness toward someone who's wronged them ... & they don't want to forgive that person. Others have an addiction. They're addicted to alcohol, they're addicted to party life, they're addicted to pornography. "The Today Show" had a segment recently about people who are addicted to shopping. They interviewed a woman who was spending about \$150 a day at various clothing stores.

Some people's sticky point is the Bible. "Can I trust this Book?" ... They question Scripture's reliability.

Some people's sticky point is that they're mad at God. God didn't show up when they wanted Him to. God didn't save the life of a loved one. He didn't save their job. And so, they're mad at Him. Some people's sticky point is they're afraid that if they put their trust in Jesus He's going to suck the fun out of their lives.

So, we need to help people identify their sticky points.

#3 ... **pray** for a miracle. Jesus tells _____ to go & sell everything, & give the money to the poor. And _____ "became very sad, because he was very rich."

Now this is especially an issue for us in the U.S.

There are so many rival gods in our affluent culture. And we're committed to those gods. We view ourselves as mostly okay people, who are self-sufficient. We're not spiritually lost ... but the truth is, there are 5,280 things that demand our attention, our time, our money.

And Jesus says to us, like He said to _____ ...

(X) "The #1 Commandment is to love God more than anything else. God tolerates no rival gods." (Exodus 20:5)

And if you're a person with lots of stuff, it takes God changing your heart with regards to what's truly important in life. Only then will you make Jesus your #1 priority on a daily basis.

If we want to see family & friends in our affluent culture come to faith in Jesus ...

we better pray for a miracle.

I love William Temple's (X) comment about prayer:

"When I pray, coincidences happen,
when I stop, they don't."

Here's what I pray as I'm thinking about my lost friends

... "Jesus, bring people into his/her life who know
you, so that I'm not the only voice talking about you."

Here's something else I pray ...

"Help them to get sick & tired for their sin, & their false
gods, & their other priorities. Help them to wake up
some morning & say, 'I want to change.'"

I pray that they'd face troubles that would make
them realize that they need something outside of
themselves. I pray that these "coincidences" would
cause a heart change. I'm praying for a miracle.

#4 ... **keep looking** for plowed ground.

One last time, let's go back to the story,
& I want you to notice something that's not there.

We read that _____ is very saddened by what
Jesus says to him about getting rid of his riches. But
Luke doesn't give us one of the details that Matthew &
Mark do. (X) Mark tells us that ...

"gloom spread over his face, & he went away." (Mark 10:22)

And ... Jesus let him! Jesus didn't chase him down.
When we have a spiritual conversation with a friend, &
they close their mind to Jesus ... we need to let them go.

I'm not suggesting that we cut off friendship, or totally give up on them spiritually ... I'm just saying, (X) don't invest all of your time & energy on that particular person, because there are other people to be reached.

(Matthew 10:14)

Jesus told a parable on one occasion where He referred to people's hearts as being like different kinds of soil. (X) We go with the "seed" of God's Word, & try to sow it. But some soil is hard, it's packed earth. The seed bounces right off. It doesn't take root. But other soil is plowed up. And it's prepared to receive the seed.

In fact, it welcomes it. (Matthew 13:3-8)

So, look for people whose hearts God has plowed up. People who are prepared to hear what we have to say about Jesus. There's a heart out there that's receptive & just waiting for us to come along.

Close your eyes right now. I want you to think about someone in your life who hasn't come to faith in Jesus Christ. It may be a family member, a friend, a neighbor ... but that person is spiritually lost. And as you're thinking about them, pray for an open door, an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation with them. ... Pray for an open mouth, that you'll have the boldness to talk to them about Jesus. ... And pray for an open heart, that they'll receive the words that you have to say.

MARANA THA