

Following Christ in World Evangelization

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In Following Christ, Joseph Stowell relates the story of Edward Kimball, a quiet and unassuming Sunday School teacher who followed Christ in evangelization. On a routine Saturday in Boston some 150 years ago, Kimball took the day to visit every young man in his class. He wanted to be sure that each one had come to know Christ. One of the students worked as a clerk in his uncle's shoe store. Kimball entered the store, walked back to the stockroom where Dwight Lyman Moody was stocking the shelves, and confronted the youth with the importance of knowing Christ personally. In that stockroom D.L. Moody accepted Christ as his Savior (on April 21, 1855). The faithful Sunday School teacher had no idea that this act of faithful evangelistic witness on his part would reap such a rich harvest for heaven. It has been estimated that during his lifetime D.L. Moody traveled more than a million miles (before the days of commercial air travel) and spoke to more than 100 million people!

It was D.L. Moody who led Wilbur Chapman to the Lord. Chapman became a great evangelist in the generation succeeding Moody's. During Chapman's ministry in Chicago, a baseball player with the "Chicago White Stockings" had a Sunday off – as all professional ballplayers did in those days – and was standing in front of a bar on State Street. A gospel wagon from the Pacific Garden Mission came by, playing hymns and inviting people to the afternoon service down the street. This ballplayer, recognizing the hymns from his childhood, attended that service and received Christ as his personal Savior.

That afternoon encounter with Christ dramatically changed the life of Billy Sunday. He played baseball for two more years then left professional sports to minister in the YMCA in Chicago. Sometime later, Wilbur Chapman was passing through town and invited Billy Sunday to join his crusade team as an advance man, to help organize pastors and set up the evangelistic meetings. Sunday enthusiastically agreed. After two years, Chapman left the evangelistic ministry to become the pastor of one of the leading churches in America. Sunday felt stranded, but he refocused on national crusade evangelism and soon began to schedule his own crusades.

In one of Billy Sunday's meetings, a young man named Mordecai Hamm accepted Christ. Hamm became a great evangelist in the southeastern United States, ministering to massive crowds south of the Mason-Dixon Line. In one of those large crowds one night, a lanky North Carolina farm boy named Billy Graham stepped out and moved forward to accept Christ.

In relaying this incredible, God-orchestrated connectivity of persons, Stowell says, "What a phenomenal succession of faithful and stellar harvesters for the cause of eternity.

Edward Kimball, the Sunday school teacher, was simply an unheralded follower who gave up a Saturday for the cause. Heaven is crowded with the results of his routine faithfulness” (Zondervan Publishing House, 1996, pp. 130 – 131).

This story of simple and straightforward evangelistic witness, a Sunday school teacher experiencing Christ and following him through a verbal proclamation of the gospel, gets to the heart and ethos of Christ-centered evangelization. Following Christ in world evangelization demands the pursuit of a personal experience with the Triune God through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit - with a corresponding passion to make Christ known among the nations.

It also means following Christ’s example in evangelization. How did *Jesus* go into *his* world and how does that model inform *us* as His followers today? How can we, how *should* we personally *experience and follow* Christ in a way that leads to effective evangelization? There are many ministry examples of Jesus described in the Gospels. In the four chapters of Luke 3-6, there are at least eight examples of following Christ:

Jesus went (and we follow):

1. *With God’s favor* (Luke 3.22) At his baptism,

“...the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”

2. *Full of the Holy Spirit/Led by the Holy Spirit* (Luke 4.1)

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.”

3. *Guided by the Word of God* (Luke 4.4)

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man does not live by bread alone.’”

4. *With the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit* (Luke 4.14; 18-19)

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.”

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

5. *With an intercultural focus* (Luke 4.25-27)

“I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.”

6. *With authority in teaching, deliverance, and healing* (Luke 4.32, 35-36, 38-39)

“They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.”

“‘Be quiet!’ Jesus said sternly. ‘Come out of him!’ Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, ‘What is this teaching?’ With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!’”

“...they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.”

7. *With a vision for those who had not heard the good news* (Luke 4. 43)

“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.”

8. *With an interdependent/ cooperative team partnership* (Luke 5-6, *italics mine*)

“When *they* had done so, *they* caught such a large number of fish that *their* nets began to break. So they signaled *their partners in the other boat* to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink” (5.6-7)

“For he (Simon Peter) and *all his companions* were astonished at the catch of fish *they* had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s *partners*. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.’ So *they* pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him” (5.9-11).

“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...” (6.12-13).

The events and experiences of Christ followers in the early church were a *continuation* of the ministry of Jesus. It is apparent that when Luke starts his introduction to the Book of Acts, he sees it as a sequel to, an unfolding continuation of the Gospel of Luke (*italics mine*), “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach ...” (Acts 1.1). If the Gospel of Luke was the story of all that Jesus began, then the Acts of the Apostles is the continuation of the ministry of Jesus.

This fact was not lost on Peter in his first public declaration following his own personal empowerment in the Holy Spirit. With a fresh boldness (*italics mine*, “Brothers, I can tell you *confidently*...” Acts 2.29), he bears witness to Jesus Christ being squarely in the middle of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (*italics mine*, “*he* [Jesus] *has poured out*”):

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, *he* has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and *has poured out* what you now see and hear” (Acts 2.32-33).”

As we follow Christ in world evangelization, he reciprocates with his own personal presence and involvement with us. He promises and demonstrates his own continuing, active presence and power to his followers (*italics mine*):

“And surely *I am with you always* to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28.20b). (The Berkeley Version), “And, mind you, I am alongside you...” (Weymouth Translation), “...day by day, until the close of the Age”

“After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the *Lord worked with them* and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it” (Mark 16.19).

Models and strategies of evangelization may adapt and change but this will remain the same: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13.8). The continuing, active presence and power of Jesus Christ will be with us daily as he works with us and we follow him in world evangelization

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