

Why Should I Seek the Lost?

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Introduction.

- A. A few days ago, my wife was poking around on MSN, and she found an article that really piqued her interest. Basically, somebody had filed a class-action against de Beers, the gigantic diamond-selling company, accusing them of price-fixing. De Beers agreed to settle the suit for hundreds of millions of dollars, and part of the settlement was set aside for ordinary consumers. Anybody who had bought a diamond in the past ten years could apply for and receive a partial refund, of hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Now, Lauren's not a mass-forward kind of gal, but she forwarded that news story to everyone she could think of who had bought a diamond in the past ten years. It was news that was too good to keep to herself.
- B. Folks, all of us know news that is just as good, and it's not about anything as cheap as diamonds. I'm referring, of course, to the good news of the gospel of Christ. The knowledge that we can be saved from our sins just by following God's simple plan of salvation is news that is much too good to keep to ourselves. At least, that's what the early Christians thought. Look at the way they are described in Acts 8:1, 4. Even when teaching the good news could get them killed like Stephen, they still went everywhere proclaiming it.
- C. That, friends, is an attitude that we need to embrace in today's church too. For our fourth and final New Year's resolution, let's resolve to do a better job of proclaiming the gospel ourselves. Once again, let's start small with this. In the back, we've got a card case full of business cards with our service times and contact information on them. Let's each of us grab a few of those cards and resolve that once a week, we're going to give one of them to somebody. We could leave one with the tip after we go out to eat, we could leave one with a co-worker who's going through a difficult time now, we could even strike up a conversation with someone in the elevator and leave them with a card. All we have to do is find one opportunity a week.
- D. As always, this is not a just-because kind of thing. There are many reasons why we should look to evangelize however we can. Let's look at some of these reasons to answer the question, "Why should I seek the lost?"

I. Reasons Now.

- A. The first reason why we should hand out cards or look for the lost in other ways is **BECAUSE JESUS COMMANDS IT**. This command appears in Matthew 28:19-20. Now, if we were inclined to be weasels, we might bring up the point that this is a command given to the eleven apostles, not to all Christians generally. However, the language of this command is recursive. It sets up a loop. The apostles were to go out, baptize, and teach the new Christians to do all that Jesus had commanded them. As part of that, the apostles taught those Christians to go and preach the gospel, since it's one of Jesus' commandments. Every Christian, then, is obliged to share in the work of evangelism, whether he was a direct disciple of Jesus, like one of the apostles, or an indirect disciple of Jesus, like all of us are. We are commanded to seek the lost.
- B. This command to teach others, though, is not some dry, formal regulation that God made up but doesn't really care about. Instead, the Bible teaches me personally that I should seek the lost **BECAUSE GOD WANTS ME TO**. This idea appears in 2 Peter 3:9. God is deeply invested in the salvation of every soul, and it makes sense that He would be so. Let me give you an illustration. As just about all of you know, ever since Lauren and I bought our house, I've spent the past eight months re-flooring the thing. I'm still not done yet. I know my floors aren't the greatest thing ever, but I still have a great attachment to them because of all the time and money and pain I've put into them. I'm a pretty hard guy to make mad, but I suspect that if you showed up at my house with an axe and began chopping my floors into flinders, that would probably do it.
- C. By contrast, mankind IS the greatest thing that God has ever created. He has breathed a little bit of Himself into each one of us, and He regards us with a love that He feels for none of His other works. Sadly, though, 99% of us are busy destroying ourselves with sin. How much do you think God likes to see that? If we want to make God's goals our goals, we'll seek the lost because God wants to see them saved.
- D. In similar fashion, we should look to pass out these cards or speak out however we can **BECAUSE JESUS DID**. Jesus' entire life shows a commitment to saving souls, and this is what we see in His own self-description in Luke 19:9-10. What Jesus says here is THE reason why He came to earth. His purpose was to redeem sinners. Friends, if we identify ourselves as Christians, what we're really saying is that we are disciples of Jesus. We look to the Master for our example, and we try to follow both His teachings and His life as closely as we can. It is literally impossible for us to be true disciples of His unless we also share His commitment to soul-winning. Saying, "I'm a Christian, except I'm not much interested in evangelism," is like saying, "I'm a big Chicago Bears fan, but I'm not interested in them when they play football." It just plain doesn't make sense. Take the soul-winning aspect away from the life of Jesus, and He doesn't even come to earth in the first place. Take interest in soul-winning away from us, and we're left as shells of what Christians should be.

- E. Even beyond this, all of us, and I personally, should commit myself to evangelism **BECAUSE I WAS LOST.** Let's look at the words of Paul in Titus 3:3. Friends, there isn't a single Christian in this room who has always been right with God. Some of us have spent decades in the bondage of sin; others have spent much less time there, but we've all seen enough of it to know that we hate it and don't want to go back. Look at how Paul describes things here. Does that sound like a pleasant, enjoyable way to go through life? Yet that's the way that every sinner around us is living right now. As just about all of you know, I'm not afraid to teach on the evils of drinking. I know that alcohol is a horrible, destructive thing, but if you want to find somebody who really hates drinking, don't come to me. Go to somebody who's battled alcoholism themselves. Go to somebody who's had to live with a parent or spouse who was a drunk, and who's come out of it. It takes somebody with first-hand experience of that evil to appreciate it for what it is. Just like that, friends, we should appreciate the evil of all sin ourselves, because we've been there, and we know just how horrible it is.
- F. Likewise, each one of us should say, "I'm going to commit myself to saving souls **BECAUSE I LOVE THE LOST.**" Sometimes, this is true specifically of the friends and family members we have who are not right with God. However, it should be generally true because of the love that God commands us to have for every member of mankind. Consider what John says about this in 1 John 3:18-19. There are numerous ways to carry out this passage. We express love whenever we are kind, considerate, and helpful to others, but the greatest expression of love is when we try to save the sinners around us. We have something that they desperately need, and in that situation, true love has no choice but to try to help.

II. Reasons in the Future.

- A. Looking into the future, though, we also see that we should bring others to Christ **BECAUSE FOLLOWING GOD IS GOOD.** There are hundreds of millions of sinners in this country, and the single best decision that any of them could make to improve their earthly lives, even, would be to come to the Lord. Let's look together at the words of Psalm 84:10. To recast this verse in our terms, it's better for us to spend a single day with God than to spend a thousand years apart from Him. As Christians, we are blessed so much by having God's word to follow, which instructs us to live happily and righteously, but even more than that, by having the assurance of God in our lives. Because I am a Christian, I know that God is watching personally over my life, that He is constantly exerting Himself to protect me, even from the sins that I commit myself. I know that no matter what struggles I encounter, God is going to bring me safely through them, and I know that even if I die, my death is not going to separate me from the eternal love of God. If I am not a Christian, I have absolutely none of that, and I don't know how sinners keep going without it. When we tell someone else about Jesus, we are doing them the biggest favor we will ever do them. Let's tell as many as we can.
- B. However, the reasons for seeking the lost go beyond this life. We should be moved to reach them, even by something as simple as passing out cards, **BECAUSE HELL IS TERRIBLE.** The problem is that when we rebel against God, we don't consider that what we're doing is actually rejecting God. God gives us chance after chance, year after year and decade after decade, to come back to Him, but sooner or later, we run out of chances. When that happens, when we have spent our whole lives turning our backs on God, God reluctantly gives us what we want. We get an eternity without Him, spent in hell. We get a glimmer of what eternity in hell is going to be like in Revelation 20:10. Hell is not annihilation. Hell is not nothingness. Hell is torment forever and ever. The Bible describes hell as being eternally eaten by worms and eternally burned with fire, but the worms and the fire aren't literal any more than the pearly gates and golden streets of heaven are. They're meant to describe, as best we can understand, the awfulness of a place that is more awful than we could possibly imagine. Every sinner we know, no matter how nice they are or how much we like them, is headed for that. Brethren, I don't even want to think about the sinners I know and love being consumed forever by the torments of hell, but we have to think about it, so that we can save them before it's too late.
- C. Finally, though, we should do what we can to reach the lost, through cards or whatever else, **BECAUSE HEAVEN IS JOYFUL.** Sometimes, we don't get this. Sometimes, I think people have an image of heaven as a boring place where people sit around with nothing to do except boring things. Folks, that sounds a lot more like hell than it does like heaven! In reality, heaven is going to be a wonderful place to be, and not just because it's better than the alternative. Look at what Jesus tells us about heaven by analogy in Matthew 25:21. If we want a nice, succinct definition of heaven, it is that heaven is the joy of God, and God is an expert on joy. He is the Creator of every good thing on earth, and He is the author of all the spiritual blessings that we have in Him. We know that the earth is flawed and imperfect because of sin, but we love this distant reflection of the joy of God so much that some part of all of us wants to stay here forever.
- D. Let me ask you, friends: if earth can be that good sometimes, despite all the heartache and sorrow that we suffer, how much better is heaven going to be when those things no longer exist for us? In Philippians 1, Paul says that going to be with Christ is very much better, and I suspect that's a massive understatement. All of the lost around us aren't just headed for eternal destruction. They're also going to miss out on the joy of heaven, and heaven is too good a thing not to share. Let's tell them about it so they can come too.

Conclusion. If you want to go to heaven, and you know you're not headed there right now, repent and return to God.