

10 - The Gospel Challenge

No Appeal

There is not a single record of Jesus following His teaching with an appeal for people to become disciples. No one is invited to pray a sinner's prayer. In fact when we examine Jesus' approach to "soul-winning" it is rather shocking.

Take for example His preaching in Nazareth which Luke tells us about in some detail. Jesus had already gained a reputation in Capernaum and the people gathered in the synagogue are eager to hear Him for themselves:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom ... All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. (Lk 4:14-22)

Jesus is full of the power of the Spirit; He has their rapt attention; they are hanging on His every word. All Jesus needs to do is to urge them to turn their hearts to God, confess their sin and ask for forgiveness. Jesus Himself can forgive them there and then. What a harvest to celebrate at the start of His ministry!

But no. With no provocation from the congregation Jesus first accuses them of scepticism and then provokes them to fury with a pointed telling of a couple of stories from the scripture. As a result He is thrown out and their hearts are turned against Him.

Any evangelist that behaves like this deserves to be thrown out and can be sure they will not get a repeat invitation! But isn't Jesus supposed to be our model? John the Baptist did the same, baiting the Pharisees saying "who warned you to flee the wrath to come? "

Both Jesus and John were more likely to provoke an adverse reaction from their congregation than make an emotional appeal to them.

Jesus says “Go home” not “Come follow me”

Although this example from Nazareth is more dramatic than the other examples recorded for us, it is nevertheless fairly typical. We assume that if someone actually came to us asking for healing or deliverance or to obtain peace with God, we should urge them follow Jesus. But Jesus never seemed to do so. Usually, after Jesus has engaged with someone in healing, or forgiveness, He tells them to go on their way.

Jesus asked her, “Has no-one condemned you?” “No-one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (Jn 8:10-11)

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” (Mk 10:52)

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Lk 7:50)

We do know that Jesus called the Twelve to follow Him, but apart from them we are more likely to see Jesus putting people off from following Him:

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.” (Matt 10:37-38)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow

you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:57-62)

A man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ... Jesus answered ... “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.’” “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Mk 10:17-21)

Jesus seemed to simply trust the Holy Spirit to take the words He had sown through His teaching and to water them until a person decided they had to seek Jesus out and become a disciple. Jesus did all He could to prevent people making spur-of-the-moment emotional responses to the Gospel. If a person did not seek Jesus out and make an effort to become a disciple, they would not become a disciple at all.

Change your ways

Are we to conclude then that Jesus preached a wishy-washy feel-good Gospel and didn’t bother with sin and repentance? Not at all. Jesus was quite clear that He came to save sinners, and that repentance was required:

“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Lk 5:32)

Jesus even sought out people He had previously healed to warn them to turn from sin:

Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” (Jn 5:14)

“Those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” (Lk 13:4-5)

We know that Jesus’ Gospel was not a wishy-washy “God loves you all. Just smile at the cat and you will get to heaven”. Far from it. Jesus’s Gospel was so challenging that it led his disciples to ask:

"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Lk 13:23-24)

The Proper Response to the Gospel

John baptised those who repented as did Jesus’ disciples:

The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptising more disciples than John although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. (Jn 4:1-2)

Both the Gospels and Acts tell us that baptism is the appropriate response to the message, not praying some prayer. If a person will not follow up their response to the Gospel with baptism then what is the response worth?