

A Great Experience Matthew 5:16 9/21/03

You know, all of us at times longingly look at the experiences of other people and say, “boy, I wonder what that would be like! I wish I could experience that!” Watching Tori Hunter hit that fast ball over the fence is just that kind of an experience. Or what must it be like to lift your arms to the Minnesota Orchestra and have them follow your every move. Well, this morning I want to talk to you about a way you can experience the most powerful event in all of life. I want to talk to you about an approach to evangelism that doesn’t require you to be an all-star. All it requires is that we have a heart that is a little bit like Jesus—and we can all do that. If that gets your heart beating with a little bit of fear, then I am glad you are here. If you have been met with a brick wall from a loved one or friend when you have tried to share your faith then I am glad you are here. This morning we are going to look at an evangelism strategy that is famous for reaching even the most hard-hearted individuals.

Let me lay some important groundwork with these two premises. **Premise # 1: Jesus was a servant.** He served the blind, the leprous, the starving, the disenfranchised, he served the crowds by telling them about the kingdom of God and He served the wedding guests by turning water into wine. He served the disciples by calming the storm. And ultimately he served all of mankind by going to the cross. As Jesus said in *Matthew 20:28 The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.* Premise # 1 Jesus was fundamentally a servant.

Premise #2 is that our goal as Christ followers is to become more and more like Jesus.

Scripture tells us that again and again. *Ephesians 5:1 “Be imitators of God as dearly beloved children and live a life of love, just as Jesus loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* After washing the disciples feet Jesus said, *“I have set for you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”*

Based on these two straightforward premises I want to make this single point this morning: when we serve others as Jesus did, when we sacrifice for others as Jesus did and when we open our hearts and lives up to others as Jesus did, hearts that seem impervious to the Gospel often times open wide.

For you see **showing is more powerful than telling**.

Let's take our Bibles and turn to our text this morning. *Matthew 5:16* "***Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.***"

And so the first step I would call deeds of love. It is the living out of what Jesus has just said is to be our modus operandi. **Let your light**. Now, who is the ultimate light? Jesus is. In John 8:12 he said, "***I am the light of the world.***" If we increasingly live out his servant heart and attitude then his love will shine out through our lives for others to see. His grace and mercy will shine brightly in our world. This light is not self-generated but rather the reflection of the presence of Jesus in our lives.

Most pastors have a whole bunch of interesting wedding stories but what I usually take away from a wedding is the radiance I see in the bride and groom because they stand there with hearts filled by the other one's love. That is the way it is to be with us. Filled with his love for us his light radiates from our very being.

Secondly, Jesus also said that our good deeds will be viewed by others. **Our light will shine before**

men. In *1 John 3:18* we read "***Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.***" Real love always leads to action. Did you catch that? Real love always leads

to action. It cannot help but spawn act that express the love that is bursting from within. The word used for good here is not the word opposite of bad rather it is the word good in terms of being winsome, beautiful and attractive. And that leads to the third idea in this text. The light of Jesus shines out in such winsome ways that people are turn to the Father in heaven. **God receives the glory**. Why is that? Because in this self-centered, me first, look our for # 1 world when someone

serves expecting not gain or recognition, no strings attached, people say there must be something

different going on inside of that person. When we are like Jesus to someone, it opens their hear to Jesus. Eugene Peterson puts it this way in the Message: ***“Be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”***

So here is where it starts. A simple act of servant hood disarms the most stubborn seeker.

After deeds of love, though, there must be **spoken words of love**. At some point we have to articulate the Gospel. If our words do not follow our actions we will be simply known as nice people rather than having them discover that God loves them. Did you catch that? Our point is not really to be known as nice people. Our desire is that they know that God loves them. The amazing reality is that it is often times much easier to talk about spiritual matters after our good service has piqued their interest. In fact often times the seeker raises the issue when they ask “why” or “how come”? And that is when you share that your motivation is grace. If you are not sure how to do this step then let me suggest that you do everything in your power to rearrange your schedule to attend the Contagious Christian seminar on the 27th. You will learn a very natural way to share the motivation for your servant deeds.

The third element **is adequate time**. In I Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow.” Seldom is evangelism a one-shot goal. It takes time to grow and develop. Studies have shown that most people need to hear a clear presentation of the gospel at least seven times before they make a commitment to Christ. We can pray that our deeds and words are another link in the chain that leads them to Christ.

I would like to get real practical right now. I want you to think about someone who is in a part of your everyday world that does not know Christ. Maybe they are indifferent to Him; maybe they are down right antagonistic. Don’t think, “how can I share Christ with them?” Think, “How can I show my faith to them?” In what way can I demonstrate Christ’s love for them be serving them or

sacrificing for them. Trust that as you are Jesus to them, God will begin to work on their hearts and minds.