

EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

by Robert C. Walton

**Grades 7-8
Year 2
Quarter 4**

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Lesson Aim

To impress upon students the responsibility to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to those who are lost.

Memory Verse

John 6:30 - “So they asked him, ‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?’”

Lesson Background

The lessons during this fourth quarter will focus on the areas of evangelism and missions, beginning with a study of the Great Commission, then stressing the sovereignty of God in salvation, and proceeding to look at five examples of evangelism from the Gospels and Acts. The latter portion of the quarter will involve a brief survey of the history of missions, followed by a look at the biblical concept of missions and its relationship to the church.

In approaching this material, you as a teacher should be aware of its importance for your students. First of all, it is vital that your students gain a proper understanding of salvation. Too many have been taught to see salvation as a decision marked by a raised hand or some such sign, and have little notion of the sovereign work of God. One’s understanding of salvation is not only crucial for the proper communication of the Gospel; it is also an essential foundation for living a life pleasing to God. Secondly, students need to see that “witnessing” is not a method or a technique, but something that flows from a life that is committed to God and given in love to others. Thirdly, it is important for your students to see that missions is no more

than evangelism elsewhere; it involves neither special methods nor special people. Finally, the closing lessons will help your students to understand the Bible's teaching about "the will of God" and "being called" - two ideas that are often shrouded in unbiblical mysticism - and recognize the important place of the church in steering people into ministry.

While you as a teacher should recognize the importance of this unit, you should also be aware that it contains one major drawback, namely that the lessons are explicitly directed toward those who already belong to God's family. Clearly, those who are not Christians cannot evangelize, since they have no good news to which they are witnesses, nor can they comprehend the purpose and nature of missions. Consequently, it is important for the teacher to keep in mind at all times the spiritual condition of the students in front of you. If most of your students have made professions of faith, you can teach the lessons as they are presented, always remembering to challenge the non-Christians in your class with their need of the very message that others are being encouraged to transmit. If most of your students are unsaved, however, you will have to adapt the lessons, giving them a primarily evangelistic thrust. After all, talking about evangelism easily lends itself to presenting the Gospel.

In today's introductory lesson, we will be looking at the Great Commission as it is recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. We will divide the lesson up into four parts, discussing first the Power (given by Christ to His witnesses through the Holy Spirit), then the Command ("make disciples"), the Method (the passage's participles - "go," "baptize," and "teach"), and finally the Presence. May this lesson help your students to gain a better understanding of this great command given by our Lord, and at the same time motivate them to carry it out more faithfully.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students, "What is the first thing you talk about when you see your friends on the first day back to school after Christmas vacation?" Most will probably respond that they tell their friends what they got for Christmas. When a person is really excited about something, he can't wait to tell his friends about it. When the Bible talks about evangelism, this is what it has in mind. The "good news" of salvation is too exciting to keep to yourself - you want to tell your friends about it right away.

Too many Christians, however, are anything but excited about the prospect of sharing their faith. This quarter's lessons will deal with various aspects of evangelism, beginning with a discussion of Jesus' final words to His disciples. While the Great Commission is recorded in different forms in the four Gospels and Acts, we will be concentrating today on the version found in Matthew 28:18-20.

1. The Power for Evangelism

In Matthew 28, the situation described is one where Jesus appears to a group of His followers after His resurrection. Many scholars believe this is the time mentioned by Paul in I Corinthians 15:6 when He appeared to over 500 people at once. Matthew 28:17 makes it clear that not everyone there was quite convinced of the reality of what they were seeing. Jesus then spoke to the assembled crowd and told them that all authority had been given to Him, both in heaven and on earth. What kind of authority or power did He have in mind? What did this have to do with the instructions He was about to give?

When Christians are afraid to speak to others about Christ, what is it that they fear? Are they afraid that they won't be able to think of the right words? Are they afraid of rejection, ridicule, or persecution? Whatever the fear may be, Jesus here makes it clear that He can overcome the cause of it. Those who fear their own weakness need to know that God is the one who made man's mouth (this excuse is an old one -

Moses tried to use it in Exodus 4:10-12 to get out of confronting Pharaoh), and can give Christians the right words to speak if they trust Him. Those who fear the reactions of others need to know that each man's heart is in God's hands, and He is able to change the heart of even the most hardened cynic. Furthermore, Christ's authority over our circumstances means that He can use even the unpleasant experiences of rejection, ridicule, and persecution to strengthen us and bring about good things in us (Romans 8:28). Thus when Jesus assured His followers that all authority had been given to Him, He was telling them that they could speak to others without fear, since they, their circumstances, and those to whom they would speak were all under His sovereign control.

2. The Command to Evangelize

After Jesus assured His disciples that He possessed power sufficient for any need, He commanded them to spread the Gospel - "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." As a teacher, you are probably aware of the fact that the word translated "go" is a participle in Greek that modifies the main verb of the sentence - "make disciples." In other words, Jesus is not commanding His disciples to go, but telling them that their task, wherever they happen to go, is to make disciples.

Ask your students to define the word "disciple" as Jesus uses it here. After they have discussed it for a while, tell them that the basic meaning of the word is "student" - in a sense, the members of your class are your disciples. People today generally think of a student as one who gains knowledge from another person. In other words, learning is viewed largely as an intellectual matter. But this is not what Jesus had in mind. In Luke 6:40, Jesus said that "everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." He did not mean by this that Christians should try to make others like themselves. Jesus Himself is the ultimate Teacher, and His disciples are those who are growing more and more like Him. Clearly, this involves far more than asking a person to "make a decision" for Christ. How does Jesus expect His followers to "make" disciples?

3. The Method of Evangelism

Ask your students to find in verses 19-20 the two ways Jesus tells His followers to go about making disciples. They should easily be able to see that the two important words in these verses that describe how evangelism is to be done are "baptizing" and "teaching." What do these imply?

Baptism here makes reference to a person's initial commitment to Christ. A person who is baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is making a public confession of his faith, and at the same time symbolically picturing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which he has accepted as his own by faith. Part of what is involved in making disciples, then, is encouraging people to repent and put their trust in Christ, and then profess that faith publicly through baptism.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that one who has led another to the point of putting his faith in Christ has fulfilled the commandment to "make disciples." One who has been newly born into the faith is like a baby, and babies need to be fed. Consequently, instruction in the faith is an essential part of disciple-making. Such instruction involves far more than a quick summary of basic truths; Jesus speaks in verse 20 of "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Thus the process of making disciples involves duplicating the life of Christ in another person. This is not something that is accomplished in a minute, an hour, a week, or a year - it is a process that takes a lifetime. All Christians should be involved in helping others to become better disciples of Jesus.

4. The Presence of God with the Evangelist

Needless to say, what Jesus asks of His followers sounds like a tall order indeed. How can a person possibly do what Jesus requires? It is difficult enough to get a person to come to Christ, but the teaching task is beyond the skills of all but the most highly trained, isn't it? It would be indeed, except for two things. The first is that Jesus' command was given to the whole church, not just to individual Christians. In other words, evangelism is a team effort as well as an individual responsibility. While every Christian can communicate the Gospel, discipling is a group effort that involves Christians helping one another to grow and mature in the faith. For this to happen, of course, a Christian must be involved with a group of believers - a church. It is only within the church that effective discipleship can be carried out over a prolonged period of time. If your students are engaged in witnessing to their friends at school, they should also be encouraging them to get involved in a good church, because it is only there that discipleship can be carried out effectively.

The second factor to consider is the promise Jesus makes in Matthew 28:20, where He says, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Spreading the Gospel is an impossible task for anyone who has to do it alone, but no Christian has to do the work alone. Jesus in this verse assured His followers that He would be with them as they carried out the work He had given them. Thus the power to change lives comes, not from the persuasiveness of the one who is bearing witness, but from the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a great comfort to those who are witnessing to others to know that the results do not depend on their eloquence or persuasiveness. The responsibility to obey lies with the witness, but the responsibility to change lives lies with God alone.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by encouraging your students who are Christians to pray for an opportunity to speak to someone about Christ in the week ahead. For the unbelievers in your class, of course, the challenge should not be to spread the Gospel, but to believe it.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT THE GREAT COMMISSION

1. Under what circumstances did Jesus speak the Great Commission? For whom was it intended?
2. Why is it important for Christians to know that God is sovereign when they set out to speak to someone about Christ?
3. What is the main verb in the Great Commission?
4. What is a disciple?
5. How did Jesus tell His followers to go about the task of making disciples?
6. What role does the church play in the disciple-making process?
7. In what way is Christ's promise that He will be with His followers to the end of the age a comfort to those who are trying to speak to others about the Gospel?

WHO DOES THE SAVING?

Lesson Aim

To show your students that salvation is of God, and that sinners are changed by divine power, not human persuasion.

Memory Verse

John 6:31 - “Our forefathers ate manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Lesson Background

One of the basic tenets of Reformed theology is the sovereignty of God in the work of salvation. If, as the Protestant Reformers affirmed, salvation is by faith alone and not by human effort in any sense of the word, then it must be true that salvation is in its entirety, from beginning to end, the work of the sovereign God. This truth has enormous implications for evangelism, of course. Anyone who tries to communicate the Gospel must understand that the results of his efforts are not dependent upon his own persuasiveness (or lack thereof), but rather upon the power of God working in the heart of the listener.

Last week, we looked at Matthew’s version of the Great Commission, in which Jesus spoke about the work of evangelism to His disciples shortly before He ascended into heaven. The passage that will provide the basis for today’s lesson is John 6, where Jesus addresses a crowd of people who profess to believe in Him. His challenge to them is not to spread the word to others, however, but to examine their own professions. The context of the passage provides some useful insight into what Jesus is saying. Shortly before this, Jesus had miraculously fed a group of over five thousand men, plus women and children. The people in the crowd were so impressed that they wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king. Such

a desire showed that they had absolutely no understanding of the true nature of His messianic mission and were merely putting their trust in a miracle-worker and potential political leader. Jesus went up into a mountain to pray, then escaped the crowd by walking across the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night. When He returned, however, He found that the crowd had been moving all around the lake trying to find Him; clearly, they wanted to be fed again. Jesus then preached the sermon found in John 6, in which He presents Himself as the Bread of Life. When He gets to the end of the chapter and begins talking about the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, the crowd, with no grasp of the spiritual symbolism Jesus is using, is repelled, and turns away to seek out some other deliverer.

The value of this passage for our purposes today, however, is found in Jesus' explanation of why the crowd cannot understand what He is saying to them, and why His disciples are able to understand and respond to that same message. The lesson is divided into three parts - God Chooses, God Draws, God Enlightens. All three will be introduced from Jesus' sermon in John 6, but we will then move beyond the sermon to consider various implications of the truth in question for the work of evangelism.

Several reminders are appropriate at this point. The first is that this material is highly theological in nature and may not be easy to communicate to middle schoolers. It will be necessary to deal with objections or questions your students may have in a slow and patient manner - after all, these ideas are difficult for many adults to grasp. The only way to make such a lesson meaningful for young teens is to make it practical - they must see how these truths relate to their own witnessing efforts among their friends at school or in the neighborhood. Of course, you may have some in your class who have never tried to share their faith. If they come to understand the subject matter of this lesson, it may encourage them to try. Others, of course, have never shared their faith because they have no faith to share. For their sake, be sure to emphasize Jesus' point that no one who turns to Him in faith will ever be refused - the desire to come to Christ is in itself a sign that God is at work in a person's life.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by narrating the story of John 6, starting with the feeding of the five thousand. Include the crowd's desire to make Jesus king by force, Jesus' efforts to avoid them, their persistence, and finally their misunderstanding and rejection of His message. Ask your students why the people in the crowd rejected Jesus. After all, they had been the beneficiaries of an amazing miracle. Why did they not believe? After the students have had an opportunity to discuss this for a few minutes, tell them that Jesus Himself explained why the people in the crowd responded as they did. Today we will look at that explanation under three headings - God Chooses, God Draws, God Enlightens.

1. God Chooses

Jesus' first word of explanation concerning the response of the crowd is found in John 6:35-40. Jesus here tells them that those who have been given to Him by the Father will come to Him, and that He will "raise them up at the last day." Ask your students what they think this means. Their response will give you some idea of their level of understanding on this issue. They may recognize immediately that God has chosen those who are to be saved; they may see that there is complete continuity between those who have been chosen by God and those who are finally brought into God's presence by Christ on the day of the Resurrection. But they also may explain the passage in terms of God's "foreknowledge," expressing the idea that God simply knows ahead of time who is going to be saved (God's sovereignty in salvation is hard for human pride to handle - even in children whose families and churches have taught them the tenets of Reformed theology).

There are a number of applications you should try to make with your students at this point. First of all, help them see that there is no real difference between saying that God knew ahead of time who would be saved and saying that God chose who would be saved. The first explanation leaves no more room for human volition than does the former, since that which God knows must come to pass as certainly as that which God chooses. There are only two real alternatives when understanding the work of salvation; either man is at God's mercy, or God must wait upon a human decision. The first is salvation by God's gift of faith, while the second is salvation by works.

Secondly, your students must understand that God's sovereignty in salvation will never create a situation where a person sincerely seeks Christ but is turned away because he is not among the elect. Seeking is in itself a sign of God's work - man in his natural state never seeks after God (Romans 3:11). This is why Jesus can say that "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." In the same way that faith is a gift of God, coming to Christ is an action motivated by God.

Thirdly, your students should recognize that they have no way of knowing whom God has chosen to save. Thus Christ told His disciples to spread the Gospel to everyone. As we saw last week, the confidence that God knows those who belong to Him can keep the person who spreads the Gospel from both pride and discouragement, since he knows that those who respond do so because of God's work, and those who reject the message show by doing so that God is not active in their lives at that time (after all, if Jesus could feed and preach to a crowd of over ten thousand people and not be discouraged when they all reject His message, why should we be upset when a few people turn a deaf ear to the words we speak?).

2. God Draws

Move now to verse 44 and ask the students what Jesus means when He talks about God drawing someone. They should be able to recognize that God draws people by the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, but that He also uses human means to accomplish this - means such as preaching and witnessing. The important lesson for your students to learn here is that God's sovereignty in salvation does not eliminate the need for carrying out the Great Commission. Many over the years have criticized the teaching of God's electing grace by saying that it undercuts any motivation people may have for spreading the Gospel. While this may on occasion have been the case, it certainly represents an abuse rather than a proper use of the doctrine. The teaching that no one can come to Christ unless he is drawn by God should not keep me from witnessing. Instead, it should encourage me to witness, since I know that God has already determined that He will call His chosen people to Himself by means of Christians who are seeking to fulfill the Great Commission. In other words, Christians can witness confidently because they know that God has already decided that their witnessing is going to produce results (in general, of course, not in every specific instance).

The other side of this issue, of course, is that it is inappropriate to motivate people to witness by telling them that millions of people will go to hell unless they do something about it. God will save His people, and He cannot be foiled by human incompetence or laziness. The proper motivation for witnessing is love, not guilt. Christians spread the Gospel because they love God and want to do what He says, and because they love other people and want them to come to know the Savior. Any other motive does not take God's sovereign power in salvation seriously.

3. God Enlightens

After having ten thousand people walk away from Him, shaking their heads as if He were crazy, it might have been easy for Jesus to get discouraged. But in verse 67, He turned to His twelve disciples and asked them if they wanted to leave, too. Peter's response perfectly illustrates in a positive sense what Jesus had been explaining to the crowd. While the people in the crowd had responded wrongly to Jesus' miracles

by wanting to make Him a political ruler, and had responded wrongly to Jesus' preaching by taking His symbolic language about eating flesh and drinking blood literally, the disciples recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and that His words were the source of spiritual life. They had seen the same works and heard that same words that the crowd had seen and heard, but they understood the significance of those works and words. In the same way that the crowd's rejection of Jesus was clear evidence that God was not drawing them to salvation (at least at that time), the disciples' understanding and positive response was evidence that God was enlightening their minds.

Again, there are several applications of value to your students. First of all, they must recognize that God does not always call one of His people to Himself the first time that person hears the Gospel. Paul heard Stephen preach and was involved in stoning him, but he later responded on the Damascus road. Just because a person fails to respond to the Gospel does not mean that that person is not among God's chosen. It simply may not be God's time to bring that person to salvation. Thus a Christian should persevere in his witness.

Secondly, not all who appear to respond positively to the Gospel are truly saved. In verse 70, Jesus showed that He knew that one of His disciples was not a true believer. Judas at this time was indistinguishable from the other eleven disciples. Even as late as the Last Supper, when Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray Him, they asked, "Is it I?" not "Is it Judas?" When Judas walked out of the room to betray Jesus, the other disciples assumed he was doing something with the money that they had entrusted to him. The important lesson here is that, in the same way that someone cannot be crossed off the list of God's elect because of his initial negative response to the Gospel, so someone cannot be automatically inscribed on that list because of an initial positive response. Only those who persevere in the faith are truly saved. This is why the matter of discipleship we looked at last week is so important - it is the disciple, not the decision-maker, who truly belongs to Christ. God will continue the work that He has begun, so that all who have been chosen by Him will be drawn to faith, will persevere, and will be raised up in the last day. Enlightening is not something that happens once, but a gradual process that God continues throughout the life of the person who belongs to Him.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by summarizing the applications that have been made. Encourage your students to examine their own professions of faith, to respond to the Gospel if they have not done so, and to spread the Gospel with confidence to others if they have.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT WHO DOES THE SAVING?

1. Why did Jesus try to discourage the people who insisted on following Him after the feeding of the five thousand?

2. How could Jesus say that only those who had been given to Him by the Father would come to Him, and yet no one who came to Him would be refused?

3. How would you respond to someone who said that since God chose who is going to be saved, there was no reason to witness to others?

4. Why should the fact that God has chosen who is to be saved be an encouragement to Christians to witness?

5. Why is it a mistake to take a person's initial response to the Gospel as an indication of that person's place in God's plan? In other words, why should one who rejects the Gospel not be written off, and why should we be cautious about saying that someone who makes a decision for Christ is saved?

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - NICODEMUS

Lesson Aim

To communicate to your students principles of witnessing through the example of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

Memory Verse

John 6:32 - "Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.'"

Lesson Background

The story of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is a very familiar one, and your students certainly are aware of most of the circumstances surrounding the meeting by now. The purpose of this lesson is not to cover the incident itself in detail, nor is it to discuss the theology of the passage, interesting though that may be. What we will be focusing on in today's lesson is the example set by Jesus as a communicator of the Gospel. By examining His conversation with Nicodemus, we will seek to derive principles that can be of use in the witness of your students.

Several points should be noted before we begin. The first is that Jesus did not follow a single uniform procedure in His dealings with people. He treated each person as a unique individual. Thus we should not expect to find in the Gospels a step-by-step procedure for witnessing, but rather a set of principles that can be put into practice in a variety of ways when dealing with a variety of people.

The second thing to remember is that not all of your students may be Christians. You know your own students, of course, but do keep in mind that the lesson materials need to be adapted to the makeup of your class. If most of your students are Christians, the approach outlined in the lesson material should work nicely, though you must remember to address those who are not with a challenge to faith in order to avoid communicating to them the presumption that they belong to Christ. If most of your students are not professing Christians, however, it would probably be more effective for you to deal with this passage in terms of its gospel content rather than as an example of witnessing. If you have access to it, the sample lesson I wrote for the lesson on John 3 in the curriculum for grades 5-6 might give you some helpful guidelines for approaching the passage in this way.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students if they are familiar with any techniques for witnessing. They may, for instance, be acquainted with the Four Spiritual Laws or the Evangelism Explosion approaches. If they are familiar with some particular approach, have them explain what they know about it. If they are not, explain to them what you know about one or more evangelism techniques. Having done so, go on to make the point that the Bible does not teach techniques of evangelism. While such approaches can be helpful in some circumstances, the fact of the matter is that Jesus dealt with each person as an individual. Rather than following the same procedure with everyone, we find Him using a variety of approaches depending on the circumstances and needs of each person to whom He speaks. In the weeks to come, we will be looking at several examples of spreading the Gospel that are found in the New Testament. As we do so, we will be looking for principles that can be applied in a variety of ways to differing situations, not a canned approach that will enable the students to speak to everyone in the same way.

Today we will begin with Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John 3. Have your students turn to the passage and read John 3:1-15. Then discuss with them the following principles derived from the passage.

1. Recognize the Real Need of the Other Person

When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he opened the conversation with a statement about Jesus' miracles. Though Jesus' miracles were important in the sense that they proved that He was who He said He was, they were not really the focal point of His ministry. Jesus did not come to do miracles, but to save the lost. Consequently, Nicodemus was really "barking up the wrong tree." The issue he was raising was not central to Jesus' ministry, nor was it crucial to Nicodemus' personal need for salvation.

Jesus' response was to bypass Nicodemus' statement entirely and switch the conversation onto a completely different track. He spoke to Nicodemus, not about what Nicodemus wanted to hear, but about what he needed to hear. Admittedly, we do not have the insight into people's hearts that Jesus had. We cannot look inside of a person and tell exactly what that person needs to the extent that Jesus could do it. Any Christian can, however, recognize that what a person presents as his problem is often not the real problem at all. It then becomes the task of the Christian to reroute the conversation into the realm of the person's true need - Jesus Christ Himself.

This is not necessarily easy to do. Jesus had the advantage of having a curious person come to Him and initiate a conversation. Sometimes Christians have experiences like that, where a person comes and begins asking questions about religion or church. Under such circumstances, diverting the conversation to the subject of Christ is relatively easy. But in most cases, people do not initiate conversation on religious subjects on their own. Thus it is important for your students to realize that what Jesus faced here is relatively

rare. In most cases, it will require, not a few minutes or a few sentences, but a long period of building a relationship before a conversation can appropriately be turned to the spiritual need of the unsaved person.

Ask your students to think of some situations where they might be able to turn a conversation to spiritual matters. Be sure to show them how problems with parents and peers can often provide openings for the discussion of spiritual things. When a young teen confides in a friend about a problem at home, it may be possible to move the conversation to a discussion of the real root of the problem - the fact that the people involved have not turned their lives over to Jesus Christ.

2. Encourage the Person to Ask Questions

In some ways, Jesus must have been a frustrating person to talk to. How many times in the Gospels did people ask Him a question and get in return, not a straight and simple answer, but some cryptic statement or parable? Think of poor Nicodemus. To him, the term “born again” was not a familiar religious cliché. How was he to know that Jesus was talking about spiritual rather than physical rebirth? Why did Jesus deal with people in this way when He just as easily could have spoken to them plainly?

In Matthew 13, Jesus explains to His disciples that He speaks in parables so that those who do not believe cannot understand what He is saying. The reason for this is that those who hear the truth without believing it are hardened in the process and driven further away from God. One who believes, however, will be drawn by the parable, and will begin to ask questions that in turn lead to greater understanding. This was the case with Nicodemus. While there is no indication that Nicodemus became a believer at this time, we do know by his behavior at the time of Christ’s death (John 19:39-42) that he eventually became a Christian. We can see that the Holy Spirit was already beginning to work in his life by the fact that Jesus’ strange words do not repel him, but encourage him to ask more questions so that he can understand what Jesus is saying.

Your students, of course, lack the wisdom of Jesus. They are not able to speak the truth in parables that will repel the mockers and draw the sincere to Christ. They can, however, speak to others in a way that invites further conversation and questioning on the part of the unbeliever. Rather than pouring out the entire plan of salvation in four easy steps before the listener has a chance to respond or even think, the wise witness will not cram the Gospel down a person’s throat, but will give only a little at a time - just enough to stimulate interest and elicit questions in the mind of one who is truly under the Spirit’s influence.

3. Tell the Person About His Responsibility Before God

When Jesus spoke to a person about the Gospel, He always made sure the person was aware of his personal need for salvation. Nicodemus, when he came to Jesus, was convinced that he was already part of the Kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that unless he was “born again,” he would not even see the kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus rebuked him for his lack of understanding, despite the fact that he was one of his nation’s most prominent teachers. Nicodemus may have gone away confused, but there is no question that he went away with an awareness that there was something missing in his life, at least as far as Jesus was concerned.

When your students speak to their friends about their faith, the easiest thing to do is to share differences - “My church does this, what does your church do?” Such an approach can easily leave the impression that all ways of coming to God are equally acceptable to Him, and that a person can be saved merely by being sincere. The only way to avoid these erroneous conclusions is to make sure a person understands that he stands in need of change in his life. Jesus did not beat Nicodemus over the head with his sin, but he did make sure that the respected scholar knew that his understanding was seriously lacking.

Many of those to whom your students speak have never really heard or understood that Christ is the only way to salvation. Most reject such an idea out of hand as reflecting a narrow-minded bigotry that says, "I'm right and everybody else is wrong." The fact of the matter is that there is such a thing as right and wrong, and this is particularly true in the matter of religion. One who does not trust Christ is under the judgment of God. The Christian is not being fair to his unsaved friend if he does not make it clear that the present course his friend is pursuing will not lead to God, but to death.

4. Invite the Person to Trust Christ

Jesus did not at this time pressure Nicodemus for a response. He did, however, tell him that the only way to gain eternal life was to believe in Him. The person who reveals needs but gives no solution to those needs is needlessly cruel. Jesus showed Nicodemus that he needed salvation, then told him where to find it. Though Nicodemus did not respond immediately, the words of Jesus eventually sank in, and Nicodemus trusted Christ for salvation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, make sure your students understand that, in most cases, what Jesus said to Nicodemus will occur over a long period of time involving many conversations. The Christian who pushes others to respond often drives them away, while the one who is patient and loving draws others to the Savior. Be sure, too, to challenge the unsaved members of your class to pay attention to the message Jesus gave to Nicodemus - unless a person is born again by the Holy Spirit, he cannot have eternal life.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - NICODEMUS

1. Why doesn't the Bible teach a "method" for witnessing? What problems can arise when a person tries to use the same approach with everyone to whom he speaks?
2. Why do people who want to talk about religious things often ask questions that have nothing to do with the real issues?
3. How did Jesus draw Nicodemus to the truth gradually? Why is this better than confronting a person who is not prepared to hear?
4. Why is a person who is not aware of his need of salvation unlikely to respond to the Gospel message?
5. How could you help a non-Christian friend understand that not every path leads to God, but that all but one lead to death?

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with principles of evangelism illustrated in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman.

Memory Verse

John 6:33 - "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Lesson Background

It would be difficult to find two people more different than Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. One was male, the other female; one was Jewish, the other Samaritan; one approached Jesus, the other was approached by Jesus; one was educated, the other obviously was not; one was a pillar of the community, the other was an outcast; one was upright and moral, the other was notorious. Yet Jesus not only spoke to both of them with equal effectiveness, but dealt with each according to his or her greatest need in a way that took their individuality into account.

Because the Samaritan woman was very different from Nicodemus, we should expect to see different principles at work in Jesus' encounter with her. To some extent this is true. Yet it should not surprise us to find Jesus doing the same basic things in a different way. As we saw with Nicodemus, Jesus addressed the real need of the Samaritan woman rather than focusing on her need as she saw it, He whetted her interest and got her to ask questions, He challenged her with her need and responsibility before God, and finally invited her to trust Him.

Consequently, in this lesson we will try to bring out the unique components of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman while at the same time comparing what we see in John 4 to what we studied last week. This should help to reinforce in the minds of the students the fact that every person must be treated as an individual, while at the same time giving the impression that certain basic elements always appear in the presentation of the Gospel, despite taking a variety of forms.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by reminding the students about what we are doing in this section of the quarter - looking at examples of witnessing in the New Testament to get a better idea of what it means to communicate the Gospel. Last week we looked at John 3, which records the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Today, our subject will be the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, which is recorded in John 4. Have your students turn to the passage and read aloud John 4:1-42 (perhaps by going around the room and having each student read several verses). This story should be familiar to your students, so again we will be able to dispense with review of the actual incident itself and move right into discussion.

Ask your students to make a list of differences between Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. The result should be something like that found in the Lesson Background. Ask your students to think of people they know (or have heard of) who might be similar to these two biblical characters. Would your students talk in the same way to these two people if they met them on the street? Ask them if they think the differences between the two would have any effect on the way the Gospel should be presented to them. Hopefully they would see that it would make considerable difference. A person couldn't even use the same words to explain the Gospel to the Samaritan woman that could be used for Nicodemus - she wouldn't understand them. At the same time, the Gospel doesn't change; people who need Christ are lost sinners, whatever their cultural or educational backgrounds may be. Thus we should expect to find both similarities and differences in the ways Jesus handled conversations with these two very different people. Divide your class into two groups, and assign one the responsibility of looking for similarities between John 3 and John 4, while the other looks for differences. To help the group doing similarities, write on the board the four major points we considered last week. Tell the group doing differences to be particularly alert for things Jesus did or talked about with the Samaritan woman that did not come up in conversation with Nicodemus. After the groups have had some time to write down their results, have each group share its conclusions with the rest of the class.

1. Similarities

The group working on similarities should be able to find all four points we talked about last week in our study of John 3. The woman's first response to Jesus was amazement that He would even speak to her (if necessary, remind your students of the depth of animosity that existed between Jews and Samaritans). As with Nicodemus, Jesus almost ignored the question she asked in order to draw her into a conversation about her spiritual need. He generated questions with his cryptic statements about "living water" in much the same way that He had by telling Nicodemus that he had to be "born again." He challenged her with her responsibility before God by talking to her about true worship, and then invited her to trust Him by revealing Himself as the promised Messiah. [NOTE: This group had the easy job. Be sure to control the discussion of this section in such a way that you don't steal the thunder of the other group, which had a much harder task to perform.]

2. Differences

Move now to the group that was looking for differences and ask them to report on what they found. They should have picked up some of the following things. If they didn't, help them out with leading questions.

A. He didn't encourage a partial response

In verse 15, the woman is ready to receive what Jesus was offering. At this point, many evangelists would have been ready to get her name on a decision card. But Jesus refuses to do that. He knows that a response based on ignorance is no response at all and refuses to allow her to rest in such meaningless "faith." Make sure your students understand that the goal of evangelism is not decisions, but disciples. Remind them of the words of the Great Commission. Jesus was looking for a follower who would "obey everything" He had commanded, not just a proverbial notch in His Bible.

B. He confronted her about her sin

When talking to Nicodemus, Jesus had never really discussed the matter of sin. He had rebuked Nicodemus for ignorance, but had not mentioned sin. With the Samaritan woman, however, Jesus deliberately brings up her sinful past, yet does so in such a gentle way that she is more amazed than offended. He knows that it is impossible for a person to turn to God unless that person also turns away from sin.

Be sure your students understand the connection here. There can be no true faith without true repentance. Any approach to the Gospel that fails to deal with sin is not the Gospel at all. Thus asking a person to "accept Jesus into his heart" without at the same time making it clear that Jesus takes over when He moves in is doing an injustice to that person.

At the same time, your students can learn much from the gentleness of Jesus here. He neither rants nor browbeats, but leads her to the point of admitting her own sin. He does not accuse, but neither does He accept her immorality. True conviction of sin is that which comes from within through the working of the Holy Spirit. "Conviction" generated by harsh confrontation tends to last only as long as the emotions produced by the confrontation remain. When your students attempt to witness to their friends, they must neither condemn them (thus seeming "holier-than-thou") nor condone their sin. If the Holy Spirit is working, conviction of sin will come from inside; it need never be produced by the witness.

C. He did not allow the conversation to get sidetracked

People who are comfortable talking about religion on a theoretical level often change their attitude dramatically when the conversation turns to personal matters. When Jesus began to speak of the Samaritan woman's failed marriages, she immediately tried to change the subject. She was much more comfortable talking about the relative merits of worshiping in Jerusalem and Mount Gerazim than she was discussing her own sin. Jesus, however, does not let her get away with it, insisting that she examine her own worship rather than the question of worship in general. She was clearly impressed, and soon went off to tell her friends in the village that she had met the Messiah.

What kind of smokescreens do people throw up today to avoid discussions of religion that strike too close to home? Some people do exactly what the Samaritan woman did - they raise abstract theological questions to keep the topic of conversation at a comfortable distance. Most of those who ask whether or not God would really condemn to hell a native in the jungle who had never heard the Gospel have little real

concern for the spiritual welfare of jungle natives. Others raise personality issues, either bringing up the name of some famous preacher who has shamed Christ through a public indiscretion, or else turning on the Christian to whom they are speaking, trying to focus on some inconsistency in that person's life. In the face of such defense mechanisms, the Christian should follow Jesus' example by patiently bringing the conversation back to the personal need of the individual to whom he is speaking. It is only when a person realizes that Christianity is a personal matter that he is able to face his own need to respond to the claims of Christ on his life.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by encouraging your Christian students to follow the example of Jesus. He spoke to others in a way that was suited to their individual needs. He didn't shrink away from those society considered to be outcasts, nor was he afraid to talk to the rich and powerful. He knew that those to whom He spoke had one thing in common - they badly needed what He had come to tell them. Your unsaved students also need to be reminded that the same Jesus who could save and change an immoral Samaritan woman can also change their lives if they turn to Him in faith.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

1. List as many ways as you can in which Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were different. Name one way in which they were the same.
2. What common elements can you find in the approaches Jesus takes to conversations with these two very different people?
3. What important lesson can you learn from the way Jesus confronted the Samaritan woman about her sin?
4. Why can there be no true faith apart from repentance?
5. What excuses have people used in speaking to you to avoid talking about religion on a personal level?

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the principles of evangelism illustrated in Jesus' conversation with the Rich Young Ruler.

Memory Verse

John 6:34 - "'Sir,' they said, 'from now on give us this bread.'"

Lesson Background

It is necessary for your students to understand that Jesus, the greatest witness of all time, did not lead everyone to whom He spoke to salvation. The Samaritan woman responded right away, Nicodemus did not take a public stand for Christ until several years after their conversation, and the Rich Young Ruler, as far as we know, turned his back on Christ forever. Because God is sovereign in salvation, we must realize that not everyone to whom we speak is going to respond positively to the message of the Gospel.

As with the other two accounts we have studied, this one should be familiar to your students. The details may not be as well known to them as those of the other passages, however, so we will be taking more of a textually-oriented approach to this week's lesson than we have in the past. While we should rightly expect that the same basic elements that were apparent in Jesus' dealings with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman will also be found in this passage, we will not be dwelling on these this week, especially since we focused on them so much last week.

While Jesus' encounter with the Rich Young Ruler can teach us some important things about witnessing, we should also note that it teaches important lessons about salvation itself. It is no accident that this conversation became a jumping-off point for Jesus to talk to His disciples about the true nature of salvation. The same should be the case in your class this week. After presenting the principles of witnessing that may be found in this passage, go on to draw out for your students the same lessons about salvation that Jesus taught to His disciples.

Lesson Procedure

Start the lesson by asking your students who they think would be harder to witness to - a homeless "street person" or a respected member of the community who regularly attends a church where the Gospel is not being faithfully preached. Help them to realize that those who are satisfied with their religion are usually not open to the Gospel, while those who are in obviously desperate straits are often willing to listen. If the Samaritan woman was an example of the person in the latter category, Nicodemus certainly fit into the former one. While the Samaritan woman responded immediately and enthusiastically to the good news of salvation, it took Nicodemus years before he identified himself publicly with Christ. An even more tragic example of someone who fits into the second category is the Rich Young Ruler. Have your students turn to Mark 10:17-31 and read the passage by going around the class and letting everyone read a few verses. Tell your students that we will be looking at this passage, not only for lessons about witnessing, but also for the lessons about salvation that Jesus taught His disciples after the rich man walked sadly away.

1. Lessons About Witnessing

This account contains the same elements we have found in John 3 and 4, but we won't take the time to go over them today. Instead, there are certain truths found in this passage that we have not encountered so far. These will be the focus of our attention.

A. A "good person" is not necessarily a Christian

The Rich Young Ruler was clearly a moral, upright person. Anyone looking at his life would have considered him a model young man. Yet there is a difference between living a moral life and being a Christian. This young man was in some ways in the same situation as Nicodemus, yet for a different reason. Both people thought they were in good shape as far as God was concerned. Nicodemus believed that to be true because of his careful observance of the religious traditions of the Jewish rabbis. The Rich Young Ruler, on the other hand, seemed to gain security from his morality. As we have already seen, sometimes the hardest person to reach is the person who is convinced that he is already in God's good graces. This certainly proved to be the case with the Rich Young Ruler. Be sure your students understand that some of the toughest people to speak to about the Gospel may well be those who would not think of getting involved in drugs or sex; such people view themselves as "good people," and thus acceptable before God.

B. Christ is the Lord, not just a good teacher

Few of the people who met Jesus in the pages of the Gospels treated Him with the respect He received from this young man. Yet the Rich Young Ruler was as far off in his understanding of who Jesus was as were the Pharisees who viewed Him as a fraud or demon-possessed Samaritan. This is why Jesus refused to allow the young man to address Him as "Good Teacher." No one can obtain salvation unless he confesses that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9-10). It simply is not enough to view Jesus as a wise man, a great leader, or a prophet. Wise men and prophets cannot save anyone from their sin - only God Himself can do

that. In the same way that Jesus discouraged this erroneous thinking on the part of the Rich Young Ruler, your students must take a stand against the false views of Christ they encounter in those with whom they speak. Whenever a Christian gives the impression that it is acceptable to view Jesus as merely a good man, he contributes to the perpetuation of a lie that leads many “good men” to eternal death.

C. Many people sincerely believe they are not sinners

Those who are Christians are so familiar with the teaching that all men are sinners that it is difficult to conceive of the fact that many people think otherwise. In fact, Christians are in a minority in believing that man is evil. Most people, though they would readily admit that they have done things wrong and “made mistakes,” do not think of themselves as “sinners.” Obviously, this was the case with the Rich Young Ruler. When Jesus listed a series of Old Testament commandments, the young man proudly asserted that he had kept them all since childhood. Jesus did not directly rebuke him for his pride, but placed a requirement before him that made it obvious how far from God he really was.

Your students need to realize that many of the people to whom they speak will have little consciousness of their own sin. To a large extent, however, this is the product of rationalization. Every person’s conscience makes him painfully aware of his own sin. People believe themselves to be good only by suppressing the evidence of their consciences. Those who witness thus face both an obstacle and an advantage. Christians know that most people do not view themselves as sinners, but they also know that their consciences tell them otherwise.

D. One cannot love men unless he first loves God

When Jesus summarized the Old Testament law, He deliberately listed only those commands that described man’s relationship with his fellow man. On the basis of these, we have already seen that the young man thought he measured up very well. Jesus needed to teach him a lesson, namely that the fulfillment of the command to love others depended on the fulfillment of the command to love God. One who does not first give his allegiance to God cannot possibly love others in the way God demands. When Jesus challenged the young man to sell all he had and give the money to the poor, He was really pointing out his failure to keep the first commandment - he clearly put his money before God.

Those who view themselves as good are using their own definitions, not God’s. God expects not only good behavior, but also right motives. A person who does good things for selfish motives (or for that matter, for any motive other than to please God) is committing sin. It is only when people see that God judges their motives that they see themselves as they really are.

E. Jesus did not try to make Christianity look easy or attractive

Too many people who try to share the Gospel are so afraid of alienating others that they avoid any mention of anything controversial or unpleasant - especially sin. Jesus always made a point of bringing out whatever separated a person from God. With the Samaritan woman, it was her immorality; with the Rich Young Ruler, it was his wealth. The fact that he was unwilling to part with his wealth in order to follow Christ showed that he was not putting God first. God is a jealous God who cannot tolerate being second to anyone or anything. Jesus knew that the young man could only be saved if he broke away from the hold money had on his life.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about gouging out eyes and cutting off hands. Such an approach is light years removed from the “cheap grace” and “easy-believism” of those who ask for decisions

for Christ without forcing people to count the cost of commitment to the Lord of the Universe. Make sure your students understand that they are doing a person no favor if they introduce him to a Christianity that makes no demands.

2. Lessons About Salvation

After the young man walked sadly away, unwilling to make the commitment Jesus required, Jesus turned to His disciples and began to instruct them.

A. Success and salvation are not the same

The disciples shared a misconception that was common among the Jews of Jesus' day. They had concluded that, since God had promised material blessing if Israel kept His law, then those who were rich must be enjoying God's blessing, and therefore must be righteous. Consequently, the rich should be the first to enter the kingdom. When Jesus exclaimed that it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom, the disciples were somewhat understandably startled.

B. Material possessions often keep a person from God

Ask your students why Jesus said what He said. Why is it hard for the rich to enter heaven? Make sure they understand that Jesus not saying that the rich go to hell because they are rich, any more than the Old Testament taught that riches were a sign of righteousness. Instead, riches often keep a person from God because they provide a false sense of security. One who has everything he needs in this world can easily ignore his spiritual poverty. Apply this to your students by reminding them that, in terms of the world's economy, every one of them would be considered rich. The material prosperity with which we are surrounded makes it easy for us to fall prey to the same temptation that consumed the Rich Young Ruler.

C. No one can save himself; only God can save anyone

When Jesus used the analogy of the camel going through the eye of a needle, He was not, as some commentators assert, talking about a small gate in the city wall that required a camel to unburden itself and kneel down in order to pass through (there is no evidence that such a gate existed before the Middle Ages). If that is what He had in mind, He would merely have been talking about something that was difficult. Verses 26-27 make it clear that Jesus had in mind, not something difficult, but something impossible. He was therefore talking about a real camel and a real needle, not a city gate. Man is totally incapable of saving himself; only God can do what man cannot possibly do. The disciples understood that Jesus' words extended beyond the realm of the rich to include everyone; make sure your students understand this also.

D. Salvation is an improvement both in this life and in eternity

Peter, as usual, immediately jumped into the conversation with both feet - firmly planted in his mouth. By asking what Jesus would give them in return for their sacrifice, he showed that he had significantly missed the point of the preceding conversation. Jesus, however, responded to his question by telling him exactly what he could expect to gain.

Jesus, of course, is honest enough with Peter to point out both the good and the bad - the sacrifices of following Christ produce great rewards along with great persecutions. Ask your students what Jesus meant when He said that His followers would receive a hundred times as much in this life of the things He mentioned - homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, etc. Help them to see that membership in the family of God

produces a relationship with other Christians that in many cases may be closer than family ties. Thus one who comes to Christ is better off both in this world and the next.

The mistake many make is to make this idea the leading concept in witnessing. Jesus told the Rich Young Ruler about sacrifices, while He encouraged His disciples with talk of rewards. If we get these backwards, we are presenting less than the true Gospel to those with whom we speak.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the lessons of the passage. Be sure to challenge any in your class who might be unbelievers with the impossibility of entering the kingdom of God apart from God's grace. Make sure, too, that they understand the futility of trusting their own "good living" as the basis for a relationship with God.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE RICH YOUNG RULER

1. Why is it easy to think that a person who lives a good life must be a Christian?
2. Why is it easy for a person who lives a good life to think that he must be a Christian?
3. Why is it necessary for a person to understand that Jesus is more than a good teacher in order to be saved?
4. How can someone go through life actually thinking that he is not a sinner? How does such an attitude keep a person from coming to salvation?
5. Why is it impossible to love other people in the way that God expects without first loving God Himself?
6. What is the danger of trying to get a person to make a decision to accept Christ without helping the person realize that his sin separates him from God?
7. How did Jesus' disciples get the idea that a rich person enjoyed special favor from God?
8. In what ways are material possessions a hindrance that keep many people from turning to God for salvation?
9. What did Jesus mean when He told His disciples that they would receive a hundred times as much as they gave up for Him in this life?

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - ZACCHAEUS

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the principles of evangelism illustrated in Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus the tax collector.

Memory Verse

John 6:35 - "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'"

Lesson Background

Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus is another one where comparisons may be fruitful for study purposes. Of all the examples we have studied so far, the one that is closest to Jesus' conversation with Zacchaeus is His meeting with the Samaritan woman. In both cases, Jesus took the initiative to make contact with someone who was a social outcast. Though the Samaritan woman knew nothing of Jesus before she met Him (their meeting occurred near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry), Zacchaeus had heard of Jesus and was curious to see Him, though I doubt that he seriously considered the possibility of meeting or conversing with the controversial preacher. With both, the response to the Gospel was positive. Thus in our fourth example, we complete the pattern of which Jesus spoke so often - tax collectors and sinners respond while the "righteous" go away sadly.

This is a lesson where your students may benefit from some background. They all know what tax collectors are, but they may not understand how the Roman tax system worked. Because the Romans were an occupying power, their taxes were never popular. They deflected the anger of the conquered population

as much as possible. First of all, they hired local people to collect their taxes for them. Thus, the anger of the subject population was aimed at their own people rather than at the Romans directly. When the taxes were collected, it was not done by having people keep detailed records and fill out long forms. Instead, the tax collector was given a district for which he was responsible and a sum of money that he was required to turn in to the Romans. How he got this sum of money was completely up to him. If he got it all from the rich, or all from the poor, or all from his own pocket, that was fine with the Romans - as long as he met his quota. He was also permitted to keep anything he collected over and above his quota. His own salary was thus based on his ability to squeeze every last denarius out of his neighbors and fellow-countrymen. It is easy to understand why tax collectors were such a despised class in first-century Palestine. Not only did they represent the interests of the Romans in opposition to those of their own people, but they also enriched themselves at the expense of their fellow Jews. Zacchaeus, of course, fit this description perfectly. He was both rich and hated by his neighbors. Yet this was the man to whom Jesus chose to minister as He passed through the city of Jericho.

Some knowledge of the importance of hospitality might also help your students understand this passage better. When two people shared food around the table, it created a bond between them. For this reason, many Jews would not eat with Gentiles or (perish the thought!) Samaritans. Someone like Zacchaeus would certainly have been included in such a ban. No respectable Jew would be caught dead sharing table fellowship with a tax collector. This explains why the Jewish crowd was so shocked when Jesus invited Himself over to Zacchaeus' house for lunch.

This lesson, like the one on the Samaritan woman, teaches the importance of taking the Gospel to those who are not considered acceptable by society at large. It is often these very people that God is preparing for His kingdom. In addition, the story of Zacchaeus illustrates very clearly the change that is produced in a person's life when that person comes to Christ. This truth can be used, not only to encourage your Christian students about what God is able to do in the lives of those who appear to be farthest away from Christ, but also should present a challenge to those in your class who are not Christians. They need to know that when God enters a person's life, that person is changed forever.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students what makes people unpopular. Middle schoolers tend to be very conscious of such matters and will undoubtedly come up with quite a few ideas in short order (be careful not to let them speak disparagingly of specific people, however). Ask them to distinguish between those who are unpopular because they bring it on themselves and those who are outcasts because of something beyond their control. Then have them think about, but not talk about, how each one of them individually responds to the unpopular people in his or her class at school. Do they distinguish between those who are justifiably and unjustifiably unpopular? Should they do so? Then tell them that today's lesson illustrates how Jesus treated someone who was enormously and justifiably unpopular. Have them turn to Luke 19:1-10 and read the passage together.

1. Who Zacchaeus Was

Go over the material in the Lesson Background about what a tax collector in the Roman Empire was and did, then explain that Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in the region around Jericho. Make sure your students understand that Zacchaeus was justifiably unpopular, not simply one of those poor souls who suffers the mockery of others because of something over which they have no control. It is only when students understand this that they will be able to appreciate the magnitude of what Jesus did in eating at Zacchaeus' home.

2. The Invitation Jesus Gave

In our culture, what Jesus did would be considered rude - one simply does not invite oneself to someone else's home for dinner, especially if one has never met the other person before. In first-century Israel, however, it was considered a high honor for a prominent person to offer to share a meal with a local citizen. Be sure your students understand why the Jews were shocked at the invitation Jesus extended to Zacchaeus. Most of them would not have tolerated being in the same room with the tax collector during a meal, thinking that they would be defiled by his mere presence.

It is at this point of the narrative that a useful comparison can be made between this passage and John 4. Ask your students to list similarities between Jesus' meetings with Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman. They should be able to see that both were outcasts in their own societies, both were people whom most Jews of Jesus' station in society would despise, both were personally and individually approached by Jesus, and both were honored by being asked for something by Jesus (sometimes we can establish a better relationship with a person by showing ourselves willing to ask for help than we can by being willing to give it).

3. The Change in Zacchaeus' Life

The fact that God was at work in the heart of Zacchaeus is evident by the way he responds to his encounter with Jesus. Point out to your students that, while the Rich Young Ruler had refused to do what Jesus asked him to do, Zacchaeus did virtually the same thing without even having been asked to do so. The outwardly moral Rich Young Ruler showed by his refusal to part with his possessions that his heart had never been changed by the grace of God. Zacchaeus, on the other hand, demonstrated the radical change that God had accomplished in his life by gladly parting with what he had spent his entire life up to that point accumulating. Jesus acknowledged the evidence of Zacchaeus' changed life by saying, "Today salvation has come to this house."

4. Lessons From the Story

Jesus describes Himself at the end of this passage as one who has come to seek and save those who are lost. Conclude the lesson by bringing out the following applications for your students:

A. Jesus was not afraid to approach the unpopular

Raise again the question with which you started the lesson. How should a Christian treat those who are unpopular? Does it make a difference whether that unpopularity is deserved or not? What can we learn from Jesus' example here? Help your students to see that those who are the outcasts of society are often those in the greatest need. And as we've already seen, those who see their need are most open to the saving message of the Gospel.

B. Those who are saved by Jesus are changed by Jesus

Those who walked away from encounters with Jesus had little doubt about where they stood with God. Nicodemus left with questions ringing in his ears that he had never thought about before. The seeds of doubt sown by Jesus eventually led him to faith. Both the Samaritan woman and Zacchaeus were changed people by the time Jesus left them. But the Rich Young Ruler, so confident when he approached Jesus, left with his illusions of righteousness shattered. There could be no false assurance of salvation for him. Conclude the lesson by challenging your students to examine their own lives and see if they have ever experienced the change that Jesus brings into the lives of those who belong to Him.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - ZACCHAEUS

1. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. How did tax collectors make their living? Why did everyone hate them?
2. What did Jesus communicate to Zacchaeus when He invited Himself over to the tax collector's home for dinner? What did He communicate to the crowd?
3. How can we tell that Zacchaeus was saved through his meeting with Jesus? Why do his actions demonstrate the work of God in his life?
4. What lessons can you learn from this story about how you should treat the people at school who are not popular? Is this true even if they deserve to be disliked?
5. When Jesus left Zacchaeus' home, the tax collector was a changed man. Is there anything in your life that shows that you have been changed by meeting Jesus?

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with the principles of evangelism illustrated in the encounter of Paul and Silas with the Philippian jailer.

Memory Verse

John 6:36 - "But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe."

Lesson Background

In the last four weeks, we have looked at examples of witnessing taken from the life of Jesus. But as we saw earlier in the quarter, before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples the responsibility to spread the Gospel. Consequently, the last example of witnessing we will discuss is taken from the book of Acts. In Acts 16:16-40, we see Paul and Silas taking advantage of the opportunity provided by an earthquake to bring the Good News to the desperate jailer who was prepared to take his own life.

Several things about this encounter can provide useful lessons for your students. First of all, they need to realize that doing God's work can sometimes land a person in quite a bit of trouble. Paul and Silas wound up in jail, not because they were criminals, but because they were serving God by casting a demon out of a demon-possessed girl whose condition was providing a handsome income for some men who were using her as a fortune-teller. Secondly, your students should recognize the tremendous witness that results from an attitude of praise. The other prisoners must have thought Paul and Silas were crazy, but they wound up having an enormous impact. Thirdly, Paul and Silas show the importance of being ready to share the Good News at all times. If they had not been ready to take advantage of the opportunity presented to them

by God, the jailer would have committed suicide and gone on to an eternity in hell. Paul and Silas would have escaped from prison, but they never would have been able to have the kind of public witness that they later had in the town of Philippi. These three lessons should effectively supplement the lessons already learned by examining the examples from the life of Christ that have occupied our attention for the last month.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking the students if they have ever gotten into trouble for doing something good. Each student will probably be able to come up with some example of this. Surely nothing they bring up will be of the magnitude of what happened to Paul and Silas, but their experiences will serve as a useful jumping-off point from which to introduce today's lesson. Make the point that God brings unpleasant experiences into our lives for good reasons, then turn together to Acts 16:16-40 and read through today's passage. Spend a few minutes reminding the class that we have been discussing examples of witnessing from Scripture, and tell them that the last example provides a good illustration of what Jesus had in mind when He gave the Great Commission. After going over this very familiar story, turn to the major lessons that the students should learn from the passage.

1. Doing God's Work Can Get a Person in Trouble

Anyone who gets the idea that becoming a Christian will solve all of his problems is in for a rude awakening. Certainly such a notion would have been foreign to Paul and Silas as they sat in the Philippian jail with their feet in the stocks. Go back to the examples your students gave of situations where they had gotten in trouble for doing good. How many of those examples could legitimately be classified as "being persecuted for the sake of righteousness"? Most were probably misunderstandings or mistakes on the part of others. With Paul and Silas, however, it was no mistake. They were imprisoned because the work they did for God cost other people money.

Your students need to realize that, if they set out to be witnesses among their friends in school or in their neighborhoods, the results might be unpleasant. For most of them, this should come as no surprise. In fact, this is the major reason why many Christians do not make any serious attempt to witness for Christ. The fear of rejection is a potent force for everyone, but especially for young teens, for whom acceptance by their peers is such an important part of their lives. They need to realize that favor with God is far more important than acceptance by their friends. They also need to see what happens in the rest of this story - that God uses the negative consequences to provide unexpected opportunities for service and to change the lives of people with whom His children come into contact.

2. A Life of Praise is a Terrific Witness

Christians do not often have unbelievers fall down in front of them and plead, "What must I do to be saved?" Any of your students who have tried to witness to their friends have probably found, not eagerness, but an unwillingness to discuss the subject of religion seriously. We should note, however, that there was a reason why the jailer came to Paul and Silas in his moment of desperation. He had already come to understand that Paul and Silas were different; they were not like most people he knew. He surely had heard that they had been traveling around Philippi preaching and that they had cast the demon out of the young fortune-teller. More likely, however, his own experience with them was the deciding factor in causing him to approach them in the prison.

What had he seen in Paul and Silas that made him want to seek them out? First of all, he had seen them suffer. In fact, he himself had inflicted some of the suffering. When he was told to imprison them, he went about his job with great enthusiasm, putting them in the innermost dungeon cell, then fastening their feet in stocks - a decidedly uncomfortable predicament. Their behavior as they suffered for Christ surely left an impression on the jailer.

Secondly, he had seen their response to suffering. Not only were they willing to suffer for what they believed, but they responded to that suffering with praise. I suspect that the jailer had never before had prisoners in his care who had spent their time in the dungeon singing - unless, of course, they had been jailed for drunkenness! The unusual behavior of Paul and Silas convinced the jailer that they were the only ones to whom he could go when he faced the threat of death (make sure your students understand that the jailer would have suffered the punishment due his prisoners had any of them escaped).

The application of this to your students should be obvious. Not only should they live in front of their friends in such a way that their profession of faith in Christ is clear to all who know them, but they should also respond to persecution - whether it consists of mockery, insults, or exclusion from the “in crowd” - in such a positive way that people wonder where they get the power to live as they do. Ask your students for specific examples of ways they can respond to mistreatment at school or in the neighborhood that would correspond to Paul and Silas’ example of praise in the dungeon.

3. A Witness Should Be Ready to Take Every Opportunity

When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?”, I doubt if the state of his soul was really what was on his mind at the time. He was much more concerned about his neck - “Help! What can I do to get out of this mess in one piece?” Paul, however, turned his words around to address his real need. Deliverance from punishment or possible death should not be his major concern; what he really needed to do was trust Christ and receive eternal salvation. Paul’s quick thinking, his ability to seize the opportunity when God presented it to him, led to the deliverance of the jailer’s body, soul, and family. If Paul had simply told the man to stop worrying, that all the prisoners were still in the jail, he probably could have calmed the man down, but a great opportunity would have been lost.

How can a person prepare himself to take advantage of opportunities such as this? First of all, a Christian needs to be able to articulate the Gospel. This doesn’t mean memorizing a canned presentation, but it does mean knowing and being able to explain the Good News to someone who has never heard it, or has heard it and doesn’t understand what he has heard.

Secondly, a Christian should pray for opportunities to share the Gospel. God honors such prayers and provides the chances. Prayer of this nature also produces a greater sensitivity in the Christian witness. One who has actively been asking God for a chance to talk to someone is more likely to recognize the opportunity when it arrives.

Thirdly, it is important to turn conversations to spiritual things when appropriate. The Philippian jailer needed salvation in Christ, but didn’t know it. When he spoke to Paul, Paul knew what he meant, but also knew what he needed, and was able to turn the conversation in a direction that met the man’s real need.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by encouraging your Christian students to live in a way that stimulates people to ask questions, and challenge the non-Christians in your class to recognize that their condition is every bit as desperate as that of the Philippian jailer and to look to Jesus for salvation.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

EXAMPLES OF EVANGELISM - THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

1. What did Paul and Silas do that caused them to be thrown into jail in Philippi?
2. Describe a situation where you have been punished for doing something good. Was the punishment deliberate - the person really wanted to hurt you because of what you had done - or was it the result of a mistake or misunderstanding?
3. Have you ever had anyone come to you and ask you about your faith because he or she had been impressed by the way you lived? If so, describe what happened. If not, why do you think this has never happened to you?
4. How do you think you should react when someone you know gives you a rough time because you profess to be a Christian?
5. Pray that God would give you an opportunity to speak to someone about Christ this week. If such an opportunity arises, write down a summary of what happened when you talked to that person.

THE GOSPEL FOR ALL

Lesson Aim

To convince students that the sovereignty of God in salvation in no way limits their responsibility to spread the Gospel to all who do not know Christ.

Memory Verse

John 6:37 - “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.”

Lesson Background

Those of a Reformed theological persuasion have often been criticized for limiting the Gospel. John Wesley believed that, though the Bible taught the doctrine of predestination, it should never be preached, since it kept men from taking responsibility for their own spiritual condition and discouraged Christians from witnessing - or so he believed. Sadly, there is enough evidence in the history of the Reformed churches to back up his assertion. Though the examples may be seen by us as aberrations, there are enough of them to warrant guarding against the misunderstanding that pits the doctrine of election and the Great Commission against one another. Simply put, the fact that God chooses some does not contradict the commandment to preach the Good News to all.

In the case of young teens, it is highly unlikely that they would have developed sufficient theological sophistication to use the doctrine of election as an excuse to avoid bearing witness. The purpose of the lesson is therefore twofold. In the first place, the lesson is intended to preempt any misuse of Reformed theology to curtail the spread of the Gospel. Your students must understand why these teachings of the Bible

don't contradict before it occurs to them that they might; once such a notion has been implanted, the ability of the mind to rationalize makes it very difficult to overcome. Secondly, the lesson should communicate to your students that they have no business deciding for God who is going to hear His Word. It is all too easy for Christians to resist any attempt to speak to certain people about Christ because they are convinced that such people "would never respond anyway."

The passage on which we will concentrate in order to communicate these truths is Acts 15. Though the doctrine of election is hardly the central issue in the debate over the acceptance of Gentiles into the church, the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council can be very helpful to us in dealing with the subject of today's lesson. There were some in the first-century church who were trying to exclude certain people from exposure to the Gospel. Though their reasons for doing so were different from those often used today, the reasons why their arguments were rejected can be useful to us.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students if there is anyone to whom the Gospel should not be preached. Hopefully, they will respond negatively. Tell them that there have been those throughout history who have believed otherwise. Why would anyone say that the Gospel is only for some?

1. Examples of Restrictiveness

A. The Early Church

Have the students turn to Acts 15 and explain the situation that produced the council meeting described there. In the days of Jesus, most Jews would have been startled at the idea that the Kingdom of God should ever include Gentiles. By the time we arrive at Acts 15, most Jews are willing to accept the fact that Gentiles can become Christians, but many insist that they become Jews in order to do so. In other words, they were saying to the Gentiles, "You must become like us in order to become Christians." They were not restricting the people to whom the Gospel could be preached, but they were placing limitations on those who responded - limitations that went beyond what God required.

Some today have a tendency to do the same thing. While they are eager to see the Gospel preached to everybody, they insist that those who respond must look, dress, and act like they do in order to be accepted as Christians. Such an attitude drives people away from Christ.

B. Hypercalvinists

In the years following the Protestant Reformation, many were so protective of the doctrines of grace that they went to extremes, insisting that the Gospel should be preached only to the elect. These "elect" were discernible by the fact that God had drawn them to hear His Word - in other words, they came to church. One who went beyond the bounds of the church to preach the Gospel was presuming to do God's work. If God wanted those people to be saved, He would surely bring them where the Word of God could be heard. Occasionally, this negative attitude was directed against the whole idea of missions. Some argued that the nations that were in the darkness of paganism were there because of God's judgment against their wickedness, and that to bring the truth to such people would involve opposing God's sovereign decrees. As we will see later, this attitude is an abuse of biblical teaching and is not to be tolerated in the church. Though your students probably have never heard anyone express such ideas, it is best for them to be exposed to them in a negative context.

C. Nineteenth-Century Americans

Another restrictive approach to evangelism appeared in the southern states of the United States prior to the Civil War. The issue involved the evangelism of the Africans who had been brought to America as slaves. Many argued against preaching the Gospel to the slaves. Some took the radical position that black men had no souls and thus could not be saved. Others argued more pragmatically, maintaining that exposure to the Gospel would put notions of equality in people's heads that could lead to nothing but trouble. Others argued, just as obnoxiously, that Christianity was good for slaves because it told them to be submissive to their masters. In all these cases, people's ideas of evangelism were restrictive and divisive, suggesting that the Gospel was only for certain kinds of people, or at least was intended to apply to different people in different ways. Unfortunately, such prejudice often remains today in the practice, if not the thinking, of many Christians.

2. Election and the Great Commission

Peter's comments in Acts 15:6-11 are helpful in considering this issue. When he talks about God choosing, it is to say that God had chosen him to preach the Gospel first to the Gentiles. He had no idea who among the Gentiles had been chosen by God until God Himself made that clear by sending the Holy Spirit upon those to whom Peter was preaching in the house of Cornelius. He focused on the fact that God had chosen him; he was not concerned with knowing who else had been chosen by God.

For the sake of your students, relate this concept to what was discussed at the beginning of the quarter in the lesson on the Great Commission. The follower of Christ is told to make disciples. While it is his responsibility to preach, the results are to be left in the hands of God. The Christian does not direct his preaching based on a knowledge of whom God has chosen; instead, he discovers those who have been chosen by God by observing their responses to his preaching.

3. The Witness Should Never Presume to Do God's Work

Jesus told His disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature. Anyone who tries to decide those to whom the Good News ought to be preached is doing God's work for Him. Only God knows those whom He has chosen, and for any Christian to presume to "screen out" people ahead of time is utterly foolish. Ask your students to list people in the Bible who were improbable candidates for salvation. We've already seen some of them - Zacchaeus and the Samaritan woman certainly belong in this category. One of the best examples of the salvation of an improbable person was Paul himself! Who would have imagined that the most zealous persecutor of Christians in Palestine would eventually be saved?

In applying this to the lives of your students, make the point that they often unconsciously "screen people out" by telling themselves that a certain person would never respond to the message of the Gospel anyway, so there is no point in even trying. Impress upon them that such a decision belongs only to God. The Christian is to preach to all, trusting that God will work in the hearts of those He has chosen to bring to Himself. For those in your class who are not Christians, make sure they understand that they should not view themselves as rejected; the Good News is offered to them as well if they repent and turn to Christ in faith.

MODERN MISSIONS - ORIGINS

Lesson Aim

To acquaint students with the beginnings of modern Protestant missions, particularly through the work of William Carey.

Memory Verse

John 6:38-39 - “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

Lesson Background

A significant portion of the Bible is taken up with narrative accounts involving the patriarchs, Israel, and Jesus and His disciples. Obviously God considers history to have value. In this unit on missions and evangelism, we have already spent five weeks looking at historical accounts taken from Scripture that teach us important principles of evangelism. We now turn to the history of missions, hoping to gain similar benefits. Today’s lesson deals with the early history of Protestant missions, and focuses in particular on the inspiring life of William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions. Today’s lesson will involve mostly lecture, but there will be occasional opportunities to elicit responses from your students.

Lesson Procedure

Tell your students that today you are going to tell them a story - the story of one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Christian church, William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions.

1. Early Missionary Efforts

When Jesus told His disciples to take the Gospel into all the world, they quickly obeyed His command. Within the span of a single generation, the Roman world had been permeated with the Good News, not only through the travels of Paul, but by means of the work of the other apostles as well. While Christians faced persecution for the first three hundred years of the church's existence, the church grew through the examples of those who suffered for their faith. In the fourth century, however, Christianity was recognized as a legal religion, and later became the official religion of the Roman Empire. This made it easier for missionaries to spread the Gospel, but what they were spreading was often a mere shadow of the good news of salvation by the grace of God taught by Jesus and Paul. Furthermore, the involvement of the Roman government meant that political factors entered into the spread of the church. In many cases, the conversions that occurred incorporated large tribal groups into the church all at once.

By the early Middle Ages, most of Europe was considered Christian, but it was a cultural Christianity. People had little or no access to the Bible and simply lived their lives by doing what the church told them to do - practicing the rituals of Catholicism in the confidence that they were thereby earning the necessary grace to gain entrance to heaven when they died. Missionary work was still being done among pagan tribal groups around the fringes of "civilized Europe," but what was being spread was the ritualistic brand of Christianity under which Europe was stagnating.

A new emphasis on missions arose with the coming of the Age of Exploration. Spain and Portugal led the way in exploring Africa, Asia, and the New World. Catholic missionaries accompanied the explorers, and soon vast new regions were opened to Christianity. But again, what was being spread was little more than tradition and ritual - not the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

2. Why the Protestants Took So Long

The Protestant Reformation began in 1517 in Germany. Why, then, did it take almost 300 years before the Protestants, who were so zealous for the truth of God's Word, to recognize the necessity of taking that truth to the unsaved throughout the world? Why didn't the Father of Protestant Missions appear in the sixteenth century rather than the late eighteenth century?

There are several reasons why Protestants got involved in the missionary endeavor at such a late date. The first and most obvious is that the Protestants spent much of their early history struggling for survival. In many countries they were severely persecuted by the Catholic Church, and all their energy was being poured into the struggle for recognition and legitimacy. The only notable exception to this was an effort by Calvin in Switzerland and Admiral de Coligny in France to sponsor a mission outpost in Brazil in 1555. This mission effort failed when the leader betrayed the group to the Portuguese Catholics, who massacred the entire company.

A second reason for the late entrance of Protestants into the work of foreign missions was their insistence on the importance of biblical truth. While biblical truth is indeed important, their disagreements as to what constituted biblical truth made it impossible for the various Protestant groups to cooperate with

one another. Far too much energy was expended in doctrinal controversy so that little was left to consider the needs of those who had never heard the Gospel.

When Protestant countries like England and Holland finally became major sea powers, they did not give the same stimulus to Protestant missions that Spain and Portugal had given to the Catholics. The English and Dutch were more interested in trade than in conquest, thus they didn't exercise quite the same level of dominance shown by the Spanish conquistadors - at least until the growth of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, commercial organizations like the British East India Company had little sympathy for missionary efforts, believing that missionaries would hinder exploitation of the native populations. Often when missionaries did go (such as John and Charles Wesley in Georgia), their ministry was restricted to colonists rather than the natives.

There were also theological considerations that kept Protestants from getting involved in missions. Many European Protestant churches fell into rationalism, Unitarianism, and eventually liberalism, which killed any desire for spreading the Gospel. Among evangelicals, hypercalvinism was a major problem - some argued that the Great Commission had been given only to the apostles and that it had already been carried out, others maintained that the heathen were in darkness as a result of God's judgment upon them, while others believed that the initiative to convert the heathen had to come from God, which led them to pray, but do nothing else. The Methodist revival in England did much to change this outlook. It was at the height of this revival that William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions, was born.

3. Carey's Early Life

Carey was born in 1761, the oldest child of a weaver and country schoolmaster. His family was religious, but only nominally Christian. His early interests were in nature and books. At the age of fourteen, he was apprenticed to a cobbler. Through the testimony of a fellow apprentice, he was converted at the age of eighteen.

4. Preparation for Missions

He continued as a shoemaker, and at age twenty took over the business. That same year he got married to his former master's sister-in-law, Dorothy, who was twenty-five at the time, and illiterate. Two years later, he was baptized into the Baptist Church. During this time, he read anything he could get his hands on, particularly travel books and languages. He taught himself Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French, and Dutch while working in his cobbler shop. He also made a crude map of the world on an old piece of leather, and as he read, he would write down everything he learned about the cultures, languages, and particularly the religions of the countries of the world. He also made a leather globe, which he would hold in his hands as he prayed for the salvation of the heathen around the world.

Carey later spent some time as a schoolmaster, and at the age of twenty-five was ordained as a Baptist minister. He was a very successful pastor, and the Lord blessed his ministry, but he was unable to generate any interest among the Baptists in the matter of foreign missions. In 1792, Carey published a book (*An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen, in Which the Religious State of Different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practical Ability of Further Undertakings are Considered* - this was just the title, not the book) in which he encouraged Christians to take the Gospel to the lost in foreign lands. He followed this up with a sermon entitled, "Expect Great Things from God, Attempt Great Things for God." Later that same year, Carey and a few other men founded the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen. Carey originally wanted to go to the islands of the South Pacific, but contact with an English doctor who had spent many years in India convinced him that India would be the best place to begin the missionary endeavor.

5. Early Struggles in India

When Carey set out for India in 1793, he faced a whole series of unexpected problems. To begin with, his family opposed his going. His father thought he was crazy, and his wife flatly refused to take their four children, nor would she consent to him leaving them to go to India alone. Even his church opposed the idea, though they eventually were won over by his enthusiasm for the task. Furthermore, the British East India Company refused to give them work permits, and no ship would agree to take them to India without permits.

They finally found a Danish ship willing to transport them to India, and Carey meanwhile convinced his wife to accompany him, along with the children. When they arrived in India, they were considered illegal aliens, so Carey immediately moved inland, away from the coast, to avoid detection and deportation. Dorothy Carey immediately became seriously ill. Carey finally found a job with the help of a sympathetic East India Company official and concentrated on learning Bengali, one of the many languages spoken by the Indian people. He soon began translating the Bible into Bengali, but he got little response among the Indian people. By 1799, Carey had labored for six years with almost no fruit; his wife had become increasingly unstable, one of his sons had died, and he had lost his job managing an indigo plantation. Things could hardly have gotten worse.

6. Success in Serampore

Toward the end of 1799, reinforcements from England arrived in the form of a printer named William Ward and schoolteachers Joshua and Hannah Marshman. The East India Company refused to let them even come ashore, so they landed in the Danish settlement of Serampore on the Indian coast. Carey left the plantation and joined them there. Carey, Marshman, and Ward soon became known as the Serampore Trio. Their efforts in India were greatly blessed by God. Soon they saw their first convert among the Hindus, and many others followed thereafter, though they experienced severe persecution from their families. Carey continued his language studies and translation work; by the time he died, he had translated the entire Bible into six Indian languages, the New Testament into twenty-three others, and smaller fragments into an additional ten languages. He also founded a number of schools for training Indian nationals, from which many pastors went out to start national churches.

There were conflicts in these years of success as well. Dorothy Carey lapsed into insanity and eventually died, and Carey remarried a Danish aristocrat, who became an invaluable assistant in his translation work. Carey himself became seriously ill and nearly died, and later a fire demolished their warehouse, damaging their press and destroying many irreplaceable manuscripts.

7. Declining Years

In 1813, Parliament forced the British East India Company to lift the ban on missionary activity, but this turned out to be something of a mixed blessing. Many volunteers came to India, but they were often unwilling to make the sacrifices that Carey and his coworkers had made. Many of Carey's supporters back in England died, and the mission board came to be controlled by men who had never even met Carey (who never left India after he arrived there in 1793), and had little understanding of his work. In his final years, Carey's health declined, and his second wife and son died, along with the faithful printer, William Ward. The mission suffered severe financial pressures and ultimately was bailed out by special offerings taken in England. Carey died in 1834, having left behind him an enormous legacy that became a pattern for many Protestant missionaries who followed.

8. Lessons to be Learned

Your students can learn at least four important lessons from the life and ministry of William Carey. The first is that God is able to do a great deal with limited talents that are dedicated to Him. Carey was not a well-educated man, yet he worked hard with the abilities he had and became one of the most respected language scholars in India.

A second lesson is that difficulties in life do not disqualify a person for God's service; instead, they are often used by God to prepare a person for more effective service. Carey's trials taught him much about what it meant to trust God, and he found that God never let him down.

Thirdly, Carey's life illustrates the importance of mutual ministry among Christians. Carey's ministry did not succeed until the Serampore Trio came together. They were able to meet one another's needs, and the strengths of each complemented the others' weaknesses. No Christian can make it alone; we need each other in order to serve God with maximum effectiveness.

Finally, William Carey's life teaches us the importance of giving God the glory for all He accomplished through us. Shortly before Carey died, he was speaking to young Alexander Duff, who later went on to become a great missionary educator. Knowing he would soon die, he told Duff, "When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey - speak about Dr. Carey's Savior." May we have the same attitude as we carry out the ministry God has for us.

1. What was the approach to missions taken by the Roman Catholic Church?
2. Why did Protestants pay little attention to missions in the early years following the Reformation?
3. Did the governments of the Protestant countries help or hinder the missionary effort? In what ways?
4. What experiences in Carey's youth influenced him to become interested in missions?
5. What obstacles did Carey face that made it difficult for him to leave England to preach the Gospel?
6. What barriers in India hindered Carey's work?
7. What were the aspects of Carey's missionary work that were most successful? Why is Bible translation so important?
8. What lessons about missions can be learned from the ministry of William Carey?

MODERN MISSIONS - NINETEENTH CENTURY

Lesson Aim

To familiarize students with some of the work done in spreading the Gospel during the Golden Age of Missions.

Memory Verse

John 6:40 - “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Lesson Background

The story of the advance of the Kingdom of God is the story of courage in the face of hardship and suffering. The thrilling tales of those men and women who have been used by God to spread the Good News where it had never been heard before have inspired Christians for generations. The nineteenth century is sometimes known as the Golden Age of European Missions. With Carey setting the pattern and Britain leading the way, missionaries traveled throughout the world, preaching the Gospel and establishing churches.

Missionary biographies have been used by God over the years to encourage many to give their lives to missionary service. We obviously don’t have time today to go into any missionary biographies in great detail, but brief exposure to the stories of some of the great missionaries of the nineteenth century may show your students what God will do with someone who commits his life to Him. Today’s lesson will consist of a series of brief biographical sketches. The purpose of these is to stimulate interest in missions among your students. You should if possible gather some missionary biographies from your church library or other sources and make them available to your students to read if their interest is piqued by today’s lesson.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students why people read biographies. After dismissing the expected “because your teacher assigns them for English class,” focus in on the need people have for heroes. Everyone needs people he can look up to and model himself after. Christians are no different from other people in this respect. While the primary model for the Christian is Jesus Himself, lesser human models are also beneficial (for instance, Paul held himself up as a model for the Corinthians to follow). But biographies can also sometimes be harmful. Sometimes writers of biographies make their subjects look so good that those who read the stories can’t possibly identify with them. The reader views the subject of the book as being such an exceptional person that “being like so-and-so” is clearly out of the question. The opposite extreme occurs when authors go out of their way to emphasize the weaknesses and failings of those about whom they are writing. Such debunking efforts serve little purpose, and tend to disillusion readers - who would want to model his life after such a person, now that I know the “truth” about him?

When the Bible gives biographical information, though, it avoids both of these harmful extremes. Bible characters are never portrayed as perfect (except Jesus, of course) - God’s Word shows them “warts and all.” On the other hand, the narratives make it clear that such flawed and sinful human beings were nonetheless loved and used by God to accomplish great things. This is what we can hope for by spending time today looking briefly at the lives of a number of nineteenth-century missionaries. In these stories we see weak, flawed, and sinful people, but people who were greatly used by God because they were willing to take their weakness and turn it over to the One who turns weakness into strength.

1. Henry Martyn - Courageous Translator

There are few better examples of the power of missionary biographies to change lives than that of Henry Martyn. In the mid-eighteenth century, a young man named David Brainerd had dedicated his life to preaching the Gospel among the American Indians in the New England colonies. When he died at the age of 29, the great preacher Jonathan Edwards, whose daughter Brainerd was to have married, edited and published the young man’s journal. It was through reading this journal that Henry Martyn decided to give himself to missionary service.

Martyn was a promising scholar who graduated at the top of his class from Cambridge University in England. When he applied to the Anglican Church’s Church Missionary Society, he was turned down because of poor health. Undaunted, he signed on as a chaplain with the British East India Company. As we saw last week, the East India Company did not like missionaries, but they did provide chaplains for their British employees overseas. When Martyn got to India, however, he refused to restrict his preaching to the British citizens. He spent some time with Carey in Serampore and caught his vision for the importance of Bible translation. The East India Company did all they could to discourage Martyn’s work among the native population, transferring him frequently in order to minimize his opportunity to develop relationships with the Indians. Martyn finally left India and traveled to Persia (Iran), where he completed a translation of the Bible into the Urdu language that is still in use today. Like his inspiration David Brainerd, however, the hardships of missionary life and the persistent opposition of those in authority took their toll, and Martyn died of tuberculosis at the age of 31.

2. Adoniram Judson - American Pioneer

One of the first Americans to involve himself in foreign missions was Adoniram Judson. Judson, like Martyn, was a brilliant student who graduated as the valedictorian of his class at Brown University. He helped to found the first American missionary society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign

Missions. He and his wife set sail for Burma shortly thereafter. While on the ship, he did quite a bit of reading and studying, and his efforts led him to change his mind on the subject of baptism. Having been a Congregationalist (the Puritans, having originally been part of the Church of England, practiced infant baptism), he now became a Baptist - despite the fact that this change meant cutting himself off from his only source of support back home. He was baptized by Carey or one of his company during a stop in India and finally arrived in Burma. It was not until two years later that a Baptist missionary society was formed in America to pick up his support needs; meanwhile, Judson had to support himself and his family while working diligently to learn a language that before this time had been totally unfamiliar to the Western world. His work in Burma was accompanied by many hardships and tragedies. He spent almost a year and a half in prison when war broke out between England and Burma. He lost two wives and two children to disease in the unhealthy climate of the Indian subcontinent. As a result of his efforts, however, the Bible was translated into Burmese, a Burmese-English/English-Burmese dictionary was published, and many were won to Christ.

3. Samuel Crowther - A Missionary to His Own People

The nineteenth century, of course, was the time of the great controversy over the practice of slavery. In the early part of the century, both British and Americans were fueling their economies with the labors of African slaves, though voices were being raised in both countries against the inhumanity of this institution. In England, a group of evangelicals known as the Clapham Sect, led by William Wilberforce, was generating enormous popular sentiment in favor of abolition. Shortly before the slave trade was ended in the British Empire, a young man named Samuel Crowther was captured in Africa and sold into slavery. He was brought to England as a slave, and was liberated when Parliament put an end to slavery in 1833. The Clapham Sect had also been active in establishing a colony on the west coast of Africa called Sierra Leone, the purpose of which was to provide a place where freed slaves could go to have a life of their own and enjoy self-government if they wished to leave England. Crowther, who had become a Christian during his years of slavery, went to Sierra Leone to attend college, and eventually was ordained as an Anglican minister. God gave him a tremendous burden for his fellow Africans who had never had the opportunity to hear the Gospel, so he became a missionary to Nigeria. As an evangelist, he was greatly used by God to bring many Africans to Christ. Though he eventually became the first black bishop in the Anglican Church, his greatest struggles in his later years were with British missionaries who found it very difficult to submit to the authority of a black man.

4. David Livingstone - Missionary Explorer

Parliament may have put an end to slavery in the British Empire in 1833, but the slavery battle was only beginning to heat up in America. A man whose reports from Africa provided much ammunition for the abolitionist cause was a Scottish missionary and explorer by the name of David Livingstone. Livingstone was converted in his late teens and became interested in missionary service through the preaching of the Scottish missionary Robert Moffatt, whose daughter he later married. During his thirty-two years of missionary service in Africa, he traveled over 30,000 miles in the largely uncharted interior of that great continent. As he traveled, he preached, healed, taught, settled disputes, drew maps, and sent frequent dispatches that told of the great work God was doing among the Africans, and also detailed the terrible toll being taken by the slave trade. At one point, no word was heard from him for a period of three years, and many believed him to be dead. An American newspaper, the *New York Herald*, sent a reporter named Henry Morton Stanley to find Livingstone. After many months of travel, he finally located Livingstone on the shores of Lake Tanganyika. The stories he published did much to publicize Livingstone's work. When the great missionary doctor and explorer died at the age of sixty, his body was returned to Scotland for burial, but his heart was buried in Africa, in the soil of the continent for whose people he had given his life.

5. Hudson Taylor - Innovator

Hudson Taylor was raised in a Methodist family in England, and like Livingstone was converted in his late teens. He immediately determined to become a missionary to China, which at that time was virtually closed to Westerners except for a few port cities along the coast. At the age of twenty-two he sailed for Shanghai, but was quickly discouraged by the inefficient and ineffective methods he found in use there. He struck out into the interior on his own, with no support, and adopted Chinese dress in order to blend in more effectively with the local people. His health soon failed, however, and he was forced to return to England. He knew that the Chinese were unlikely to permit him to return, but his desire to reach them for Christ grew even stronger. His prayers were answered when the pressure of several European nations forced China to open its doors to Westerners, but he quickly found that no mission organizations in England were willing to sponsor him for work in such a hazardous place. He then formed the China Inland Mission in 1865, and the next year set sail for China. By the time of his death, China Inland Mission had over 600 missionaries in China and had initiated Gospel preaching in every province of that vast country.

Taylor's greatest contribution to missionary work was the innovations he introduced. As was already mentioned, he insisted that his missionaries adopt Chinese dress and customs insofar as they did not contradict the teachings of Scripture. He found that by living like the people, he was able to reach them much more effectively than if he had tried to import a little piece of England into the middle of China. He also emphasized trusting God for support; while he made the needs of his work known in England and elsewhere, he never asked for money, but God supplied the needs of him and the missionaries who later joined him in the work. Taylor also insisted that policy decisions be made by the missionaries on the field rather than by a board back in England that had no real knowledge of what was going on. His courage to do things differently not only was honored by God through the conversion of many Chinese, but also set an example followed by many missionary organizations established in the years that followed.

6. C.T. Studd - Spiritual Athlete

“All-American Football Player Says No to NFL, Goes to Africa As Missionary.” Can you see the headlines now? Imagine what the people of America would think if the hottest college prospect in the nation passed up the chance to earn millions of dollars playing professional football in order to become a missionary! The sensation such a decision would create could hardly be less than that stirred up in England when C.T. Studd, All-England cricketer, announced his intention to go to China as a missionary. Studd had been converted through the preaching of Dwight L. Moody on one of Moody's trips to England, and though he did not face the prospect of becoming a millionaire by playing professional sports, he turned his back on a lucrative future when he decided to join the China Inland Mission and become one of Hudson Taylor's “willing, skillful laborers.” Studd did what the Rich Young Ruler had refused to do - he gave away most of his substantial family fortune and left it all behind in order to serve the Lord. By the time Studd died at the age of sixty-nine, he had served on three different mission fields, including nine years in China, six years in India, and nineteen years in Africa. Even in those years when poor health forced him home, he traveled all over England publicizing the cause of missions and encouraging others to give their lives to the preaching of the Gospel.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by asking your students what they can learn from the example of each of the missionaries covered in today's session. If they have trouble coming up with ideas, suggest some of the following. While Martyn and Judson were exceptionally bright and Studd was a wealthy and gifted athlete,

these men turned away from what others wanted them to do with their talents and lives and “wasted” them in relative obscurity overseas. Talent is never wasted when it is given to God, however. Martyn also proves that obstacles are not signs that tell us to quit, but signals that God uses to show us alternative ways to serve; in addition, he shows us that a short life lived for God is preferable to a long life lived selfishly. Judson illustrates the hard truth that loss of family may accompany Christian service (though this is as true at home as it is abroad), and that biblical convictions should never be compromised to maintain the support of others. Crowther shows us that God is able to overcome the handicaps of a difficult past, and also teaches that often a Christian servant’s greatest obstacles will come from other Christians. Livingstone teaches the lesson that the solitary Christian can have a major impact on the world for good when he is doing the work of God, while Taylor shows that God honors those with the courage to do what is right, even if “it’s never been done that way before.” Finally, Studd, too, shows that the one who loses his life will save it.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

MODERN MISSIONS NINETEENTH CENTURY

1. What is the value of reading missionary biographies? How was Henry Martyn's life changed by reading one?
2. How did faithfulness to the Word of God cost Adoniram Judson the support of those back in America who had sent him?
3. What barriers did Samuel Crowther have to overcome in order to serve God in Nigeria?
4. How did David Livingstone's work have an impact on the slavery controversy in America?
5. In what ways did Hudson Taylor depart from the normal missionary practices of his day? How did these changes contribute to the success of the China Inland Mission?
6. What do the missionaries studied in today's lesson teach about the meaning of Jesus' words in Luke 14:26-27?

WHAT IS A MISSIONARY?

Lesson Aim

To help students understand both the specific and general definitions of missionary work and challenge them to fulfill their God-given responsibilities in this area.

Memory Verse

John 6:41 - “At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’”

Lesson Background

Many young people have serious misconceptions about what a missionary really is. Part of the reason for this is that they have gotten a lot of conflicting information from others on the subject. Probably the major source of this conflicting information is the fact that the word “missionary” can be used in a variety of ways.

To begin with, we should immediately recognize that the word itself does not appear in Scripture (the noun “evangelist” and the verb “to evangelize” both appear frequently, however). Probably the most common use of the term among Christians is to refer to a person who commits his life full-time to preaching the Gospel in a foreign country, or at least in a different culture from his own. We speak of people who are missionaries to Africa or India, as well as those who are missionaries to American Indians or Jewish people. Yet this definition is not entirely adequate. To begin with, not all missionaries are directly engaged in preaching the Good News. Many are engaged in what are called support ministries - airplane pilots, radio technicians, doctors and nurses, etc. These people give their lives full-time to minister in another culture,

but are not directly involved in evangelism - at least no more so than any other Christian anywhere in the world.

Furthermore, I'm sure we've all heard it said that every Christian is a missionary. What is meant by this statement? When Jesus gave the Great Commission, it was not intended solely for the Twelve. In fact, many commentators believe that the occasion when Jesus spoke those words was the one where Paul speaks of Him as appearing to over five hundred people at once. Consequently, we must conclude that the task of spreading the Gospel is not restricted to professionals. Every Christian is responsible to speak to others about his faith as he goes about the normal tasks of everyday life. In a sense, then, all Christians can legitimately be called missionaries, since they are engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Today's lesson will attempt to alleviate some of the confusion caused by the different uses of the term "missionary" by defining the three distinct uses of the word indicated above. It is important that your students understand this matter, not simply so that they are able to be linguistically precise when they speak, but so that they realize that one who is not in a professional Christian service career is still a missionary. It is far too easy to leave the task of evangelism to others; your students need to recognize that Jesus did not leave this option open. Along the way, they should also gain a better understanding of the variety of opportunities open for serving God abroad in a full-time career.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students the simple question, "What is a missionary?" As indicated in the Lesson Background, you should get a variety of answers. Everyone knows what a missionary is, but when it comes down to constructing a precise definition, your students will find that it's not as easy as they think. Once they become aware of the ambiguity of the term, tell them that the word can be used in a Christian sense in three basic ways (other religions use the word, too, of course, and it can even be used in a secular sense to describe anyone who verbally advocates a particular cause in a public way).

1. The Cross-Cultural Evangelist

Certainly the most common use of the term "missionary" is in reference to someone who devotes his entire life to the cause of cross-cultural evangelism and church planting. Ask your students if they can think of anyone in the Bible who fits this description. The immediate response should be "Paul," but point out that Paul does not really quite fit the mold. While he did travel all over the Roman world to preach the Gospel and did receive support from various churches while doing so, he also helped support himself by tentmaking. The work he did, however, certainly fits the model of the missionary in this first sense. The other apostles probably fit the mold a little better than Paul did, because they apparently relied almost exclusively on the churches for their support, while Paul chose to support himself in order not to be a burden to those to whom he preached.

What are the characteristics of such missionaries? First of all, they devote their full time to the ministry in which they are engaged. Secondly, their ministry is one of direct evangelism and church planting. Thirdly, they do this work in a culture that is not their own, whether in their own country or one foreign to them.

Next, bring out a list of the missionaries supported by your church. How many of them fit this model? Are they all full-time (probably)? Are they all involved directly in the work of evangelism (probably not; your church in all likelihood supports some people who are doing support work, which is the subject of the next section)? Are they all working in a cross-cultural setting (possibly not; your church may support

foreign nationals who are working among their own people, or citizens of your own country who are laboring in situations where outside support is needed)? Obviously, our understanding of a missionary needs to be expanded beyond the definition of a cross-cultural evangelist.

One other point should be made before moving on to a discussion of support personnel. Ask your students, “What is the difference between the kind of missionary we have been talking about and an elder in this church?” Help them to recognize that, aside from the cross-cultural aspect of the missionary’s work and the fact that you may have elders in your church who are not full-time, there is very little difference between the two. A missionary in the sense we have been discussing here is simply a pastor who does his work in a culture other than his own.

2. The Full-Time Support Worker

If your church supports any missionaries who could be classified as support workers, go back to them at this time and talk about what they do. The possibilities here are endless. You could have teachers of missionary children, doctors and nurses, pilots and mechanics, radio technicians and engineers, computer programmers, Bible translators - the list goes on ad infinitum.

You need to communicate three points to your students in this section. The first is that support ministry is biblical. Ask them if they can think of anyone in the Bible who would qualify as a missionary support worker. Perhaps the most obvious example is Luke, who traveled with Paul as his physician and also chronicled his labors for posterity. The second is that God uses a wide variety of abilities and talents in spreading His Kingdom. Whatever occupation your students may have in mind at this point, they should realize that God is able to put them to work in that job in a way that contributes to the spread of the Gospel. Not every missionary has to be a professional preacher.

A third emphasis involves praying for missionaries in a realistic way. The more your students know about what your church’s missionaries actually do, the more intelligently they will be able to pray for them. They will also be more prepared to see them as normal people like themselves whom God is using to do His work in a place far from their homes, rather than as some super-spiritual caste of extraordinary saints who are totally unlike the “average Christians” in your church.

3. The Everyday Christian

Ask your students whether they consider themselves to be missionaries. This question, of course, brings us to the third and most general use of the term - one that applies to all Christians. There are two points to be made here. The first is that all Christians should be missionaries in the sense of the Great Commission. Every believer is charged with the responsibility of “preaching the Gospel to every creature.” It is all too easy to push this responsibility aside and leave it for “the professionals.” Impress upon your students that God intended this job to be done by everyone who was part of His family, not by just a few.

The second point to be stressed is that your students who are Christians *are* missionaries whether they like it or not. All who bear the name of Christ bear witness to Him every day of their lives, by everything they do and say. What are your students communicating about Jesus to those around them by the way they live their lives?

Conclusion

Conclude your lesson with a challenge to any unbelievers in your class to think about the definition of a mission field - and realize that they qualify.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WHAT IS A MISSIONARY?

1. What are the three major ways in which the word “missionary” may be used?
2. Name someone from the New Testament who fits each of the three definitions, and explain why he or she fits it.
3. Name someone connected with your church who fits each of the three definitions, and explain why he or she fits it.
4. What do cross-cultural evangelists and pastors have in common? How are they different?
5. How are support workers on mission fields around the world like the Christians in your own church? How are they different?
6. In what sense does God intend you to be a missionary? What can you do to be more faithful to God in this area?

WHAT IS A CALL?

Lesson Aim

To remove some of the confusion that often exists in the minds of young people about what constitutes a call to missionary work.

Memory Verse

John 6:42 - "They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I came down from heaven?"'"

Lesson Background

Every year in missionary conferences, thousands of young people dedicate their lives to missionary service, believing that God has "called" them to the mission field. Out of these thousands, only a small minority will actually enter missionary service, and many of these will experience failure and disillusionment. Certainly this cannot be because God has changed His mind. No, the fact that so many are "called" yet so few find productive ministry in missions is rather an indication of the extent to which the concept of "the call" is misunderstood by young people. For this reason, it is important for your students to gain a correct understanding of what does and does not constitute a call to Christian service, missionary or otherwise.

Today's lesson will therefore be devoted to sorting out the biblical teaching regarding a person's call to Christian service. We will begin by talking about the ways in which all Christians are called - they are called to salvation, called to holy living, and called to service. Then we will talk about callings to professional Christian service, using Paul's life and teachings as an example. We will note that Paul was called through a vision (which is something your students should not expect), confirmed in his calling by the

church, and later instructed others to judge a man's calling on the basis of his personal qualifications and gifts. The end result for your students is that, if they are Christians, they should realize that they have all been called to a life of service for God. On the other hand, a calling to professional Christian service is never merely subjective, but is always confirmed by the church and accompanied by corresponding character traits and gifts. [For a very helpful treatment of this whole subject in the context of career decision making, see Martin E. Clark, *Choosing Your Career*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1981]

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking your students if they think it is necessary for a person to be called to be as missionary. What is a call? How does one receive it? Why do so many people who think they are called to missionary service later decide otherwise? Allow your students to kick these questions around for a few minutes, then tell them that, in today's lesson, you will be looking at what the Bible teaches about being called to serve the Lord.

1. All Christians Are Called by God

In the vast majority of the instances when the Bible talks about someone being called, it uses the word in a way that refers to all Christians, not just to a special few. What are some of the ways in which all Christians are called by God?

A. Called to Salvation

Verses such as I Corinthians 1:9 and I Peter 2:9 tell us that those who are Christians have become part of the family of God because God has called them to salvation. No one can come to Christ unless God calls him, so this is clearly a sense in which all Christians have been called.

B. Called to Holy Living

In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul tells the members of the church at Corinth that they have been called to be saints. What this means is that God has called them to live holy lives. This refers, not to the kind of life lived by monks or martyrs, but to the kind of life that is given to God in all of its aspects. Spend a few minutes asking your students what they think this means in practical terms for them now. If they are Christians, what does it mean for them to pursue God's call to holy living? Make sure they understand that this implies such basic matters as obedience to parents and diligence in school.

C. Called to Serve God

When we looked at the Great Commission at the beginning of the quarter, we saw that it included all Christians, not just a select few. Christians are to serve God wherever they are and whatever they are doing. A life of service involves both obedience (John 14:15; 15:16) and witness.

We may conclude then that every Christian has received a calling from God. There is no need for a person to wait to be called in order to serve God, since all Christians have been called to serve Him by living lives of obedience and bearing witness to the surrounding world.

2. Some Christians Are Called to Professional Service

There are times, however, where the Bible does speak of a kind of call that does not apply to all Christians. We will use the life and teachings of Paul as an example of the special kind of call we are considering here.

A. The Inner Call

When Paul was called to preach the Gospel, the validity of the call was unmistakable. Jesus spoke to him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus and called him to a life of apostolic ministry. In the same way that there are no more apostles today (Ephesians 2:20 tells us that their role was foundational; they started the church and gave us the New Testament), people today should not anticipate receiving visions from God calling them to preach the Gospel. In fact, many of those who have claimed to receive such visions, and gone out to preach on the basis of them, have wound up starting false religions or bizarre cults (e.g., Mohammed, the founder of Islam, believed that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he had been called to be God's prophet; Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, claimed a multitude of visions, the first of which set him apart as a prophet and apostle, while others became the source of Mormon doctrines). Anyone who believes he has seen a vision should not act upon it, but should mistrust it. If someone preaches on the basis of a vision, such a person is not to be believed.

What, then, if anything, corresponds to the call received by Paul in the church today? Paul himself gives us an indication in I Timothy 3:1 when he talks about someone who desires or sets his heart on serving God as an elder in the church. The first way in which God works to set a person aside for professional service is by giving that person a desire for it. There are far too many people who stop here, however. The vast majority of people who say they are "called" to the mission field are talking about some subjective desire on their part. There is nothing wrong with this, but no one should take such a desire as the final word. It is the people who act on an inner desire and no more who find their "calls" mysteriously evaporating or their service doomed to failure.

B. The Equipment God Provides

In I Timothy 3, Paul begins by talking about desire, but then goes on to talk about qualifications. While a few of the qualifications he lists involve gifts and abilities (such as the fact that the elder must be a capable teacher), most involve character qualities and maturity. The best equipment for a life of service is a consistent Christian character, developed through years of maturity. As a result, it is rare that a young person can possibly know whether or not God has called him to a professional Christian service career. The desire for such service is commendable, but any expression of certainty about God's calling in one who has not yet attained a measure of maturity is presumptuous.

C. The Confirmation of the Church

It is interesting to note that Paul did not begin his missionary career immediately after his experience on the Damascus road. He may have spoken to some Jews in the synagogue in Damascus, but he basically kept a low profile for about the next thirteen years. It was not until the church in Antioch specifically commissioned him for missionary service that he began the career to which God had called him (Acts 13:1-3).

How can a Christian know whether his desire for professional service is from God, or is the result of his own presumption? The only way to be sure is if he receives confirmation of his calling from the

church. When others see that God has been preparing and equipping a person for a professional ministry, that person can then have greater confidence in the validity of his calling. In other words, if you are the only one who thinks you have been called to professional service, you have good reason to question the divine origin of your desire. On the other hand, if others recognize in you the requisite gifts for service and encourage you to pursue them, you have a basis for confidence that Christ is indeed calling you to follow him in some field of professional service.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by reviewing the ways in which all Christians are called and encouraging your Christian students to fulfill their callings in these areas, both in their family lives and in school, church, and their neighborhoods. Also caution them about too easily concluding that they have been called to professional service, while at the same time encouraging them to express a willingness to follow that route if God does indeed call them to it. Finally, remind your non-Christian students that they, too, have been called - called to salvation in Jesus Christ. This is a call to which they must respond, or face the consequences of eternal judgment.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

WHAT IS A CALL?

1. In what ways are all Christians called by God? Do these “calls” have anything to do with missionary service?
2. Is there a special sense in which pastors and missionaries are called by God? How is this “call” received?
3. Why should people today not expect to see visions like Paul saw on the road to Damascus calling them to missionary service?
4. Why is the desire to serve God in a professional Christian service career never a sure sign that a person has been called by God to such service?
5. What role does the church play in helping a person to know whether or not he has been called by God to missionary service?

MISSIONS AND THE CHURCH

Lesson Aim

To give students an understanding of how missionary activity fits into the overall work of the church.

Memory Verse

John 6:43-44 - “‘Stop grumbling among yourselves,’ Jesus answered. ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.’”

Lesson Background

With the growth of independent, interdenominational, and “faith” missions in the nineteenth century, there arose a growing tendency for missionary work to be cut off from the church. Missionaries discerned their own calling, independent boards trained them and decided where they would go and what they would do, and they then went around to various churches soliciting financial support. Their supporting churches would then get periodic prayer letters and would see the missionaries every four or five years when they came home on furlough, which time was usually spent visiting supporting churches and soliciting further support. The missionaries were accountable only to the mission board, were not really involved with the church in any substantial way, and often knew very few people in their supporting churches. For the missionary, there was little concept of belonging to a particular body of believers. This pattern has become the status quo today, and is the way most people perceive missionary work.

When we look at the New Testament, however, we see a significantly different situation. Missionaries like Paul and Barnabas were chosen, commissioned, and sent out by a church - in their case, by the church at Antioch. They received support from a variety of sources, including the churches they

planted and to whom they ministered. They kept in contact with the churches through the letters that make up a significant part of our New Testament, and were accountable to the Antioch church, to whom they periodically reported about their work. In other words, they were part of a church, and their ministry was part of the ministry of that church. Though we cannot assert that the example of Paul and Barnabas should be precisely duplicated today (after all, they were apostles), we nonetheless should take seriously what the New Testament teaches us about their relationship to and involvement with the church.

The purpose of the lesson, then, is to help your students see missionary work as an integral part of the ministry of the church. Seeing it this way will not only help them to view missionaries as normal people who are simply doing the work of the church in a different place, but will also encourage them to see any future missionary work in which they may be interested in the context of the ministry of the local church.

Lesson Procedure

Start the lesson by asking your students why it is important for a Christian to be part of a local church. They should be able to come up with a substantial list of reasons fairly quickly. Their reasons should include things like fellowship, mutual edification, instruction, and pastoral oversight (though they undoubtedly will use different words to communicate these ideas). Next, ask them what church missionaries belong to. The answers will differ depending on the situation of your church's missionaries, of course. Some of the missionaries supported by your church may be pastors of churches in the countries where they work; others may fellowship in a church on a missionary compound. The fact of the matter is that your students probably will not know the answer to this question. Whether they do or not, one answer that they probably will *not* be able to give is that the missionary is a member of your church. Tell your students that today we will finish up the unit on missions by considering the question of what relationship a missionary should have to the local church.

1. The Missionary's Call is Confirmed by the Church

As we saw last week, no one can say that he has been called by God for professional Christian ministry unless that call has been confirmed by the church. Even Paul did not become a "full-time missionary" until the church in Antioch chose him and Barnabas to spread the Gospel in Cyprus and Asia Minor. The participation of the church in this part of a missionary's work is a tremendous safeguard to failure and disillusionment. A person who has been recognized by his church as having been called by God to do the work of the Gospel can have confidence as he goes out; one who does not have the benefit of such support can easily come to question his call in the face of little or no response from those among whom he is working.

2. The Missionary is Sent by the Church

Have your students turn again to Acts 13:1-3. Here we find that the church at Antioch not only confirmed the calling of Paul and Barnabas, but also sent them out with their blessing and prayers. What does it mean for a church to "send" a missionary? For one thing, it means that the church makes the final determination as to where the missionary goes and what kind of ministry he engages in. Given the vastness of the world and the complicated nature of missionary work in the era of nations rather than empires, churches certainly need help in making such a determination. Mission agencies can often be helpful in this area, providing opportunities and knowledge of conditions abroad that are essential for making wise decisions about the direction that missionary endeavors should take.

Secondly, a church that sends a missionary views that missionary's work as an extension of its own ministry. When Jesus told His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations, He sent them not only to Jerusalem and the province of Judea, but also to neighboring Samaria and ultimately the entire world. The only way a church can fulfill this commission is to extend its work beyond its own neighborhood by sending those who have been called by God to other places. Again, there are few churches that are capable of doing this on their own. Cooperative effort is required so that churches are able to fulfill the commission given to them by Christ.

3. The Missionary is Supported by the Church

Missionary support in the New Testament was a cooperative effort, as it must be in most cases today. Paul received support from the churches he founded, though at times he declined to take anything from them (e.g., Corinth). He helped to provide his own support, though he asserted that he had the right not to do so. Today, few churches have the necessary resources to be the sole supporters of a missionary. Consequently, cooperative effort is essential. Churches provide support for missionaries in whom they have confidence, even though they may be from other congregations. By sharing in the missionary's support, the church also gains the benefit of participating in the missionary's work and gaining understanding of what God is doing in other parts of the world.

Of course, supporting a missionary involves more than simply sending money. Ask your students what other ways a church can support a missionary besides financially. Several good answers can be given at this point. For one thing, a church can support a missionary by taking an active interest in the missionary's work. Such interest can be shown by regular correspondence, by soliciting specific prayer requests and following through on these requests with faithful prayer, and by sending information that will keep the missionary up to date with what is going on in the church at home.

A second way that a church can support the work of a missionary is by encouraging people in the church to establish relationships with the missionary and his family. This can be done by personal correspondence, by sending personal gifts to the missionary or his children, or by having the missionary into your home when he is in the area. Knowing people on the level of friendship will provide the kind of emotional support that is vital for missionaries, who are often isolated from their families and the culture in which they grew up. Encourage your students to get involved in this kind of support by writing to a missionary supported by your church, particularly if one of your missionaries has a child who is about the same age as your students.

4. The Missionary is Accountable to the Church

Have your students turn now to Acts 14:27-28. Note that Paul and Barnabas reported back to the church at Antioch about the work they had been doing in Cyprus and Asia Minor. Also mention to your students that they recognized their responsibility to report to the apostles in Jerusalem, and to submit to their authority as a result of the decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). What does it mean for a missionary to be accountable to a sending church today?

For one thing, it means that he should seek the counsel of the church for major decisions affecting his ministry. Paul was no "lone wolf" on the mission field; he recognized that he was under the authority of others and submitted to their decisions.

Secondly, the missionary is responsible to communicate information about his ministry to the sending church. After all, his ministry is an extension of the church's ministry, and the church can neither pray intelligently nor advise wisely if they don't know what is going on.

Thirdly, the elders of the church are responsible to exercise pastoral oversight over the missionary and his family. The most difficult problems faced by missionaries are not usually ministry problems, but personal problems - the same kind of problems faced by all other Christians. The daily struggles of marriage, child-raising, and finances tend to give missionaries the most headaches. It is these same problems that elders deal with every day at home, and about which they are qualified to advise and counsel missionaries and the others committed to their care. It is isolation from this kind of support that is often most devastating to missionaries, who need help in these matters every bit as much as Christians in churches here at home.

Conclusion

Conclude the lesson by encouraging your students in three directions. First of all, as has already been mentioned, encourage them to develop friendships with missionaries supported by your church - especially if any have children of middle school age. Secondly, if any of them have missionary aspirations at this point, let them know that they should, even at this early stage, be receiving counsel from the elders of the church as to how they can test and utilize their gifts in order to prepare for what God has for them in the future. Lastly, encourage your students who know the Lord to be missionaries right at home, particularly in their contacts with unsaved relatives and friends, some of whom may be sitting in the Sunday School class with them at the moment.

FOR REVIEW AND FURTHER THOUGHT

MISSIONS AND THE CHURCH

1. Why is it important for all Christians to belong to and be involved with a local church?
2. How can a missionary be a part of a church when he is thousands of miles away?
3. What role should a local church play in deciding who becomes a missionary, where that missionary goes, and what he does?
4. Why is cooperative effort between churches necessary in sending and supporting missionaries today?
5. What responsibilities does a missionary have to the church that sent him? What responsibilities does the church have to the missionaries they send?
6. How can you help the missionaries supported by your church to feel more like they are a part of the church?