

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”
“Harvest: Bumper or Bummer Crop?”
Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.
Sunday, August 8, 2021

What words come to your mind when I say root canal? Agony? Despair? Pain? Dread? Necessity? E.g., I recall when I was going in for my first root canal, I was dreading it. I had heard enough bad things about a root canal that I knew I had to prepare myself for the worst. But then I went through it, and I found out it was not nearly as bad as I had thought. In fact, it was more like getting a cavity filled than anything else. This week I am scheduled to get a tooth addressed by an endodontist, and I may well have a root canal, and I am hoping for the same— or better!— result. Nevertheless, root canals are indeed seen as necessary at times, and they are often dreaded. In the Church we seem to have our own word for “root canal”, and that is evangelism. It is indeed necessary at times, and it is often dreaded. Christians have to ask two questions here. First, why is that? And second, what did Jesus have to say about evangelism? In answer to the first question— why is that?— I think the answer is that we don’t have a proper understanding of evangelism. We will get a proper understanding of evangelism when we understand what Jesus had to say on evangelism-- and the image He chose to describe it. Hence the title to this new sermon series, “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”.

READ Matthew 9:35-38 (pp. 9-10)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just done some remarkable things in beginning His ministry. He preached the Sermon on the Mount in chs. 5-7. And in ch. 9 He heals a paralytic and forgives his sins at the same time— and receives some criticism, calls Matthew the tax collector to follow Him and defends it with teaching and preaching, teaches on fasting, Then He raises a girl from the dead, heals indirectly a woman with a blood flow, restores the sight to two blind men, and casts out a demon from a mute man. For this last miracle He receives again criticism— where the Pharisees say by the ruler of demons Jesus casts out demons. Now Jesus sets out on a tour of cities and villages.

READ v 35. “Jesus’ earthly ministry consisted of three things: teaching, preaching, and healing. Does this resemble His Church today? Cf. 4:23; 10:1,5-8.” Notice that this three-part description of Jesus’ ministry— teaching, preaching, and healing— is used nearly verbatim in 4:23; READ. It is a helpful, perhaps convicting, question to ask whether Jesus’ Church resembles Him in this. Let’s take a moment to examine each. Jesus taught in their synagogues. We can see Paul’s emphasis in his ministry where he enters a town, goes first to the Jewish synagogue and proclaims the gospel, and then he goes to the Gentiles. We see this in Acts and spelled out in Romans 1:16. Do we have a heart and passion to share the Good News that the Messiah has come with the Jews? E.g., Michelle Beadle, herself a Jewish believer, does a wonderful ministry sharing the gospel with Jewish people, and we have had her speak at our church in the past. To do so takes teaching. What is an essential trait of a good teacher? Patience. E.g., I am reading a biography on the former coach of the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi, called *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, by David Maraniss. Lombardi taught chemistry and physics in high school, and he was a high school football coach and was very successful. He coached at West Point, the New York Giants, and then the Green Bay Packers. He was known popularly

for being harsh and having a volcanic temper, but he was also known as an exceptional teacher. This was part of his philosophy of teaching: his goal was to teach on a level that the slowest student could understand. Have you ever had a teacher like that? E.g., I am reminded of Nabeel Qureshi in his book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, where he discusses his relationship with his great friend David, a Christian; even though Qureshi grew up in a loving Muslim home and he grew up to embrace Islam, he was challenged during his entire college time by David to consider Christianity, as David patiently challenged him with the truth of the gospel, and Qureshi eventually came to follow Jesus. Beloved, we need to be like that with the gospel. Jesus also preached the good news. There may be times when we need to go from teaching to preaching— where we proclaim to others the truth of the gospel and compel people to follow Jesus for salvation. What is the difference between teaching and preaching? Teaching is more about explaining something, like doctrine, or relaying information; preaching is about aiming toward salvation. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation [κήρύγματος], to save those who believe.” κηρύσσω means “to proclaim”, from which the noun κήρυγμα comes. Have you ever preached, or proclaimed, the good news about Jesus? E.g., I recall being in a conversation with someone about where they were spiritually, and then I felt the Lord moving me to ask, “But where are you with Jesus? Are you following Him as Lord and Savior?” That was a proclaiming moment. Finally, Jesus was about healing— from every kind of ailment. At times the mainline church neglects this ministry, but we do so at the peril of those whom God would like to heal. E.g., we used to have healing services after the worship services on communion Sundays, and because of COVID we have gotten away from that. Well, today we will start back, after church today, in the chapel-- but we will social distance.

READ vv 36-37. “The context in which Jesus did these things can be summarized in one word: compassion. Why? Because He saw people, in their natural state, as they *really* are: without hope. Cf. Ezekiel 34:23-24; Zechariah 10:2-3.” Our translation has “harassed and helpless”. The verb for “harassed” is σκόλλω, which means “to tire, to worry; in the passive, to be troubled, worried”. The verb for “helpless” is ριπτέω, which means “to throw, to throw down”. So the crowd was worried and felt as though they had been thrown down and helpless, a people without hope. Jesus said they were like sheep without a shepherd. And Jesus desired to be their shepherd, especially after the promise of God wanting to send a Davidic shepherd to care for His people; READ Ezekiel 34:23-24. Are people today like that? E.g., I have heard often how since COVID with its quarantines the suicide rate for young people has increased; I have seen the worry and concern people have as the most recent surge of the delta variant of COVID is now here. E.g., AAPPublications.org, “Study: Suicidal Behavior in Youths Higher During COVID-19 Closures than in 2019”, states that suicides among 11-21 year olds rose. Now, more than ever, people are worried and hopeless, like sheep with no shepherd to care for them. For Christians, our hope is not based on our circumstances, which can change radically from one day to the next; rather, our hope is based on our unchanging Lord Jesus, who will never abandon us. E.g., I am reminded of the Ethiopian Dereje Tekle who was sharing his faith with his village, and one evening angry residents of the village attacked his house, looking for him to kill him— but he escaped out of the rear of the house. Tekle states, “There is only one Mighty One— the One who sent us. If we die, we are going to Him. But just trust the Lord; do not be afraid. Fear is a disease. If you fear, you cannot walk even one step. The One who is with you, He is greater than fear. Don’t be afraid. Trust the Lord” (from *Voice of the Martyrs* August, 2021 (vol. 55, No. 8), “Love First, Share Second”, p.5). What is the solution?

READ v 38. “Therefore, Jesus saw the solution as a prayer request for more harvesters because, if people who are open to the gospel can be likened to crops, then the harvest is like a bumper crop! Cf. John 4:34-38.” READ John 4:34-38. We hear a lot about millennials being largely unchurched today and uninterested in going to church, ignorant of biblical Christianity, and living for material pleasures. But we cannot become despondent and think all is lost in the Church’s ministry. Think about it. If people are made in God’s image and for a relationship with Him, then they will naturally be open to Him. To resist Him and ignore Him takes a lot of energy. E.g., what is the natural state of a moth to light? The moth goes toward the light and is attracted to it. E.g., oil and water need to be shaken together in salad dressing, but once the container is left on its own, the oil and water naturally separate. So are we in our natural state move toward God. And this is true for a rebellious world. To deny Him is to buy into a worldview that is totally foreign to us and defies common sense. E.g., *Publisher’s Weekly* reports that in 2020 the best selling book was former President Barak Obama’s *A Promised Land*, which sold just over 2.5 million copies; but they failed to mention that the best selling book not just in 2020, but in every year is the Bible, which in 2020 sold 500 million. Beloved, the fields are ripe for harvesting. And when we harvest something we have helped to plant, that is a really awesome feeling!

“Are you and I part of Jesus’ solution?” We have a choice this morning. We can either see the idea of sharing our faith as like a root canal or like a grand, joyful harvest. My prayer is that this week we would enter into His joyful harvest and bring the gospel to a world which is so often without hope because it is so often without Jesus, the Good Shepherd.