

“Go to Those Most Likely to Listen”  
(John 4:43-45)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

When Jesus called His first disciples

He characterized the work He called them to as fishing for men –

Likely because they were fisherman –

This was something they could relate to –

But also because this is what He wanted them to do.

That work was not peculiar to them –

Spurgeon certainly believed this.

A few Wednesdays ago, we saw him using the analogy of fishing

To describe what the Lord calls us to do –

Draw men together to hear the Gospel with gathering bait –

Catch their interest in some way –

And then land them with catching bait –

Bring them into the kingdom with a specific application of the Gospel.

Spurgeon’s whole ministry was geared at converting the lost

Because that’s what he believed Jesus calls His church to do.

But how are we to go about doing this?

Jesus says, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19).

Who better to learn from than the Master Fisherman Himself?

As we go through the Gospel of John  
We not only see Jesus' heart towards the lost,  
But how He goes about catching fish –  
How He gathers His lost His sheep.  
By God's grace, this will encourage us to do the same  
Bearing in mind that He is still fishing for men –  
He is still seeking His sheep –  
Only now, He's doing it through us.

Last time, we saw a great example  
In His approach to the Samaritan woman,  
And through her to an entire city of Samaritans.

Let me just mention the things we saw again, briefly –  
Since we went through them so quickly:

1. Every opportunity you have to share the Gospel  
Comes by divine appointment –  
Even as Jesus' did with the woman at the well.  
So try to make the most of each.
2. Whenever possible, make the Gospel as concrete as you can  
By connecting it to something your audience is familiar with –  
Such as what Jesus said to His first disciples who were fishing,  
“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19);

And what He said to the Samaritan woman at the well –

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (v. 10).

3. Be willing to share the Gospel at all times,

With whomever the Lord brings into your path –

Even your enemies –

Remember, even though the Jews and Samaritans hated each other,

Jesus reached out to her.

4. Don’t get sidetracked from the Gospel into debates that don’t matter –

Such as the Samaritan woman tried to do when she asked Jesus

Whether the Jews or Samaritans were right

About how and where one ought to worship (v. 20).

5. Make sure you tell them what God offers –

As Jesus did when He told her about the gift of God –

Tell them about eternal life (vv. 10, 14).

6. Tell them how this gift alone can satisfy –

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (vv. 13-14).

Use your own testimony as to how it satisfied you.

7. Make sure you point them to Jesus

As the only One from whom they can receive it –

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and *who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water*’” (v. 10).

8. Know the Lord will use the efforts you make in their lives in some way –

You might be breaking ground by being the first to share it with them.

You might be planting seed or watering seed.

Or you might have the opportunity to reap.

Jesus told His disciples to lift up their eyes

To see that the fields were already ripe for harvest (v. 35),

Because of the efforts of others (vv. 36-38).

9. Knowing this is true,

Break as much ground as you can;

Plant as much seed as you can;

Water that seed;

And reap when the Lord gives you opportunity –

Knowing He will reward you

For everything you do in each of these areas

With a reward you get to keep forever.

This morning, let’s consider one more principle from our passage

That has two sides to it: When to work the ground and when not to.

B. Preview.

We read in verse 43, that Jesus eventually moved on from where He was:

“After the two days He went forth from there into Galilee.”

Galilee was His original destination,

Before He stopped to reap this harvest in Samaria.

Though the Gospel was first to be given to the Jews,

Jesus graciously shared it with the Samaritans.

He even stayed with them for two more days

To ground them in the truth.

The better you understand something,

The more quickly and easily you can communicate it to others.

Jesus surveyed the OT with two on the road to Emmaus

And forever changed their lives in the course of seven miles (Luke 24:32).

How much more could He do so

By spending two full days with the Samaritans?

This is why we should be encouraged

To study the Gospel and know it as best we can

That we might more effectively share it with others.

But as He continued into Galilee,

We see something a bit unexpected:

He passed by Nazareth –

His hometown; the place where He was raised –

“For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country” (v. 44).

He went instead to the other regions of Galilee –

Where He knew they would receive Him

Because of their earlier response at Jerusalem –

John told us in 2:23, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.”

And he tells us now, “So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast” (v. 45).

This morning, let’s consider that when you evangelize:

1. You shouldn’t waste your time with those who don’t want to listen.
2. But spend your time instead with those who do.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, don’t waste your time with those who don’t want to listen.

As I said before,

What Jesus does here almost seems a bit out of character –

He purposely avoided Nazareth.

But that really shouldn’t surprise us,

Because there are times when God doesn’t want His Gospel preached to certain people.

He kept His truth from a vast majority of the world from Adam until the time of Christ.

Why? Because of their sin.

He would be gracious to them later,

But it wasn't yet His time.

When Jesus came into the world,

He went first to Israel –

Not to the Gentiles, not to the Samaritans –

Though, as we've seen, there were exceptions.

Jesus said the children must first be satisfied (Mark 7:27).

When He sent Paul and Silas out to preach,

There were places the Spirit wouldn't allow them to go.

Luke writes in Acts 16, "They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas" (vv. 6-8).

Again, it was not yet time.

Why did Jesus avoid Nazareth?

Because He knew they would not believe or receive Him.

Sometimes it's difficult to know exactly

How the events of the Gospels fit together,

But it's quite possible that after Jesus goes again to Cana of Galilee –

As we'll see next in John –

That He will go to Nazareth,

Minister in their synagogue,

With the result that they will want to kill Him,

As we read this morning in Luke 4.

Why were they like this?

For two reasons:

First, because they didn't want to hear the truth –

They were sinners, bent against the Gospel.

The second was,

They didn't want to hear it from someone

With whom they were too familiar –

Because familiarity breeds contempt.

Nazareth is where Jesus grew up,

And no prophet is received well at home.

We read in Matthew 13, “He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, ‘Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?’ And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household.’ And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief” (vv. 54-58).

They just couldn't accept as a prophet of God

One they had known as a child.

Jesus had the same problem with His family –

His half-brothers also didn't believe in Him.

We read in John 7, “After these things Jesus was walking in Galilee, for He was unwilling to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. Now the feast of the Jews, the Feast of Booths, was near. Therefore His brothers said to



Him, ‘Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be *known* publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him” (vv. 1-5).

Remember what happened when Joseph told his father and brothers about his dream (Gen. 37:10-11)?

Or Eliab’s reaction when his youngest brother David showed up to fight Goliath (1 Sam. 17:28)?

They just couldn’t accept the fact that God would use them in this way.

It’s easier to respect the authority,

Or to appreciate the gifts and abilities,

Of a stranger, rather than someone you know well.

It basically boils down to pride:

Someone I know can’t be greater than I am.

That’s why it’s difficult for children to evangelize their parents;

Or parents, their children;

Or for siblings to share the Gospel with each other;

Or to minister the good news

To people you went to school with or grew up with –

Besides the fact they’re unconverted

And really don’t want to hear it.

You need to build relationships with others

If you want to share the Gospel with them.

But you need to be careful not to get too close.

The more familiar they become with you,  
The less likely they will be to respect what you have to say,  
Partly because they will begin to see your flaws,  
And the more flaws they see in you,  
The more they will excuse themselves for not believing.  
This is also a very good reason to live as godly as possible,  
Especially when you're around unbelievers.

But flaws aren't the only problem:  
Jesus didn't have any flaws,  
And yet they wouldn't listen to Him  
Simply because they had known Him for too long.

There are reasons people won't listen to the Gospel:  
Maybe it isn't God's time.  
Maybe they're in too sinful a condition.  
Sometimes you haven't yet built a bridge to reach them,  
Or maybe it's because you've built too many bridges.

B. One thing though is clear:

You shouldn't waste time with those who don't want to hear;  
You need to spend your time with those who do.

When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach in the towns and villages of Israel,  
He told them, "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out  
of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, it will

be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city” (Matt. 10:14-15).

He also said on another occasion, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matt. 7:6).

If they don’t listen, move on!

Jesus passed over Nazareth, but went to where He knew they would listen.

“So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they themselves also went to the feast” (v. 45).

That’s what you need to do.

One more thing should be noted here:

When it came to ministry, Jesus made evangelism His priority.

John Wesley, like Spurgeon, also shared this opinion.

There will be those who need you to minister to them in other areas –

And you should try to help everyone you can –

Especially in the body of Christ.

But there are those who need you more – those who are in danger of hell.

Wesley writes as though this is all that matters, though we know that’s not what he thought, “You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go not only to those that need you, but to those that need you most. It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance.”

Make the salvation of souls your priority.

Finally, how can we do this?

I know that we would all like nothing more

Than to spend our time speaking with people

Who want to know about Jesus.

It's one of the most fulfilling and blessed things you can possibly do in this life.

But how can you find those who do?

You can't unless you first build a bridge.

If you don't build bridges –

If you don't develop relationships with your neighbors –

If you don't chum the water with gathering bait –

You'll never know if the Lord has given them a hunger for the Gospel –

You won't be able to use the catching bait.

How can you build these bridges?

The answer to that question is so varied,

It would take a lifetime to answer.

So let me offer this principle instead –

One I'll mention briefly now,

But one we're going to look at more carefully this evening:

Where there's a will, there's a way.

If you want to reach someone,

You will find a way.

Why should you *want to*?

Because that's what Jesus calls you to do –

He says, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15).

You should also want to

Because your neighbor will die and suffer for eternity if you don't.

Love for Jesus and love for your neighbor

Are the two strongest motives you can possibly have:

If you have these, you have all you need.

John Wesley noted this when he wrote, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I care not whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth."

Pray that the Lord would grant you the grace

Not to fear men, but to fear Him.

Pray that He would take away your desire for the things of this world

And strengthen your desire for Him and His kingdom.

It's only if you have this kind of heart

That the Lord will really be able to use you.

Amen.

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