

How To Convert The Lost

Introduction. If I asked you what your greatest specific job as a Christian is, what would you tell me? Would you tell me that it is converting people? I believe that no greater, more enduring work can be undertaken than that of converting souls for the Master. However, congregations of the Lord's people grow very slowly today, if at all. Has the human heart changed? Has the gospel lost its power? Have we stopped emphasizing the importance of teaching people the gospel? I am not going to make myself out as the good guy trying to prod all of the rest of you. I do not get out and work as hard as I could to try and convert people.

Jesus stated that His prime mission was to save the lost (Luke 19:10). To help Him in that task, He chose disciples whom He would teach and send them out to convert others. In Mark 1:17, Jesus called them "fishers of men." We need to become better fishers of men.

There is a story in the Old Testament which helps us understand God's way of helping others. It takes place in 2 Kings 4:18-37 with Gehazi and Elisha. Elisha was a prophet of God and Gehazi was his assistant. They got an opportunity to raise a child from the dead and demonstrate to us two different approaches in spreading the gospel.

The first thing we must do is decide for ourselves the importance of a soul. If you were to stand in an oil field and think of the monetary value beneath your feet, it would be overwhelming. If you went to downtown Houston and looked at the millions of dollars in property, it would amaze anyone. If you added all these together, they would stagger the imagination! Yet one soul is of far greater value (Matthew 16:26). That is the attitude the Christian must have.

I. ***Gehazi -- The Failure Of Formalism***

A. He was unsympathetic -- vs. 27.

1. He did not have any encouraging words for her, in fact, he would have "pushed her away" had it not have been for Elisha.
2. In order to help those who need to obey the gospel, we need compassion. In order to fulfill our duties in helping those who are in need, we need compassion. Jesus Christ felt compassion for people, both spiritually and physically (Matthew 9:36; 15:32).
3. Arthur H. Stainback said, "The value of compassion cannot be over-emphasized. Anyone can criticize. It takes a true believer to be compassionate. No greater burden can be borne by an individual than to know no one cares or understands." I hope that seeing many acts of violence does not affect our compassion with one another.

B. He was obedient -- vs. 26.

1. Gehazi was characteristic of a lot of Christians in our day and time. They are obedient and ready to go. They echo the sentiments of Paul when he said, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you" (Romans 1:15). This is a powerful conviction.
2. No one is more important than when they are about the Master's business. Gehazi was very faithful to his master's word in that he greeted no man but went straight to take care of the situation.
3. The best work that we can ever do is saving a soul from death (James 5:19-20). Hardly anything I can do will rival the satisfaction of seeing people obeying the gospel and remaining steadfast.

C. He did not ask God for help -- vs. 29.

1. It is difficult to surmise exactly why Elisha sent his staff with Gehazi. Different speculations include to test the woman's faith, to humble his servant's pride or to demonstrate the power of God instead of some magical power in a staff. It seems that the most natural explanation is that the miracle would only be granted by faith and prayer. Gehazi's spirituality was too defective to have this kind of power.
2. No matter what the reason, Gehazi approached the woman and her dead child and did not even cry to the Lord for help. Raising someone from the dead would have been a daunting task, but Gehazi did not seek the Lord's power to awaken her.
3. Anyone familiar with the gospel realizes that it is extremely conceited to assume that we can do anything without the power of God (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13). Teaching someone the gospel is no different.

D. He did not have power -- vs. 31.

1. No matter how hard Gehazi tried, he could not raise the child. The most probable reason is that obviously the power was not in the staff. The miracle needed faith, prayer and dedication. Gehazi simply could not get the job done.
2. Sometimes we mistakenly put our emphasis upon efforts which do not possess power. We believe in our own ability to speak or present the gospel message. We think we are smooth enough or persistent enough to talk anyone into obedience to the gospel.
3. Anything which relies on something other than the power of the gospel will not produce the correct results (Romans 1:16). Gehazi's failure of formalism was topped off by his dependence, not upon God, but upon something which he could see and touch. Our lives and our power is obtained by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

II. *Elisha -- The Victory Of Faith*

- A. He had real sympathy -- vs. 27.
 - 1. This man's heart was deeply affected by this woman's loss. William Cowper said, "Man may dismiss compassion from his heart, but God never will." May our love never grow cold to go out and teach those who are lost!
 - 2. When we show ourselves full of love and concern, we generate trust within people. We also show ourselves to be more like Christ because of His sympathy toward those who were lost (Matthew 18:12-13).
- B. He asked God for help -- vs. 33.
 - 1. Human sympathy is good, but not good enough to meet the needs of this case. James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
 - 2. The person who has the love of God within them, who is aware of their own weakness and realizes that they need God's help will be the ones who are successful. We need to trust in the power of God to bring forth fruit (1 Corinthians 3:5-7).
- C. He was consecrated to the Lord -- vs. 34.
 - 1. Elisha stretched himself upon the child. It was not his staff or anything else he possessed which helped him carry out his work. In a similar way, Christ stretched Himself upon the world when He died on the cross (1 Corinthians 3:10-11).
 - 2. There is no other way to convert people than by faithful prayer and personal dedication to the work. Those who are spiritually dead need the embrace of the living. Give yourself to the work and look to God for the increase (Psalm 51:12-13).
- D. He was successful -- vs. 35.
 - 1. Elisha believed that he would see the work of God and he saw it. He went forth in sympathy, prayer and self-sacrificing effort, and came back rejoicing because the Lord had blessed his efforts.
 - 2. All life has a source in the living. We need to be that source for the world and lift up our eyes and look on the fields which are ready to harvest (John 4:35).

Conclusion. Can you perform this work for God? Everyone including myself needs to learn this valuable lesson. There is no more urgent need in the church today than for Christians who can and will talk to people about their soul's need and about Jesus Christ who satisfies that need. Little of the burning passion for men's souls that characterized Jesus and the early Christians can be found among Christians today. I certainly include myself in that group.

We must find it within ourselves to set aside the time and make the effort to convert people. Not only is it the will of God, but also the congregation must be a healthy and striving congregation. It cannot grow unless we are all willing to give a hand and help bring souls to Jesus. Our Lord commanded us to "go and teach all nations." All may not become as efficient as some others, but each can do personal work in their own way and in their own world. The absolute urgent need is for Christians who will say, "Here am I; send me" (Isaiah 6:8).