

Articles and Sermons :: Bring Them To Christ - Chip Brogden

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Bring Them To Christ

The goal of all Spirit-led ministry is to bring people to Christ. Allow me to break this statement down and explain what I mean.

If we aim for nothing we will reach nothing. Some Christian workers speak of a goal, some of a vision, some of a calling, some of a burden. Whatever phraseology you wish to use, you need to know God's purpose for your life. I can be very bold and tell you that I already know what your purpose in life is. How can I do this, when I have never met you? I can boldly say I know what God's purpose is for you because His purpose for me is the same, and His purpose for all the saints is the same. It is the ultimate aim of God, and what He hopes to accomplish through you. We are THE CALLED according to His purpose, to be THE CONFORMED to the image of His Dear Son. What a high, noble calling this is!

I am amazed and saddened at the number of Christians who have no goal, no purpose, no vision which consumes them, no motivation other than to just make it to the next church service. We ought to grieve and weep over this. Sometimes I would like to just go to these precious believers, take them by the shoulders, and give them a good shaking! Wake up, you sleeping ones, and Christ will give you light! Rise up and fulfill your destiny! There is a goal, and Paul called it "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ." Christian brother and sister, you are meant for more than mere survival.

SPIRIT-LED MINISTRY

What is ministry? It is that service which we perform first to the Lord and then to others. David ministered first to the Lord on the harp, and later he ministered to Saul on the harp. The believers in Antioch ministered to the Lord in prayer and fasting, and afterwards they ministered to one another. Let us recognize that our first ministry is to the Lord, not to people. Perhaps you have been in a situation where the people came first, and the work became so huge and the needs so great that you neglected to minister to the Lord. Before long you felt deflated and empty inside. This happens when we are reaching out, but not reaching up.

I like the way Jesus selected His disciples, and the explanation as to why they were selected: "that they should be with Him, and that they might go forth and preach." Their being sent forth was contingent upon their having been with the Lord. Preaching was only optional, but being with Him was the primary objective. If they will only be with the Lord then they will have something to say when they do go forth.

Of course we remember how Jesus would leave the crowds and depart for some lonely place where He could commune with the Father. It goes without saying that if Jesus found it necessary to be with the Father, how much more necessary is it for us, weak creatures as we are?

If our ministry is led of the Spirit it will bring forth the Life. "My Words are Spirit, and they are Life." How can we tell if we are being led of the Spirit? We need only observe if Life is coming forth, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. The Life flows out from our innermost being.

BRING PEOPLE TO CHRIST

So we have talked about what Spirit-led ministry is, and we have mentioned a goal. What is the goal? The goal is to bring people to Christ.

Now let's examine this closely. When we hear the phrase, "bring people to Christ" we are apt to think in terms of tent revivals, evangelistic meetings, and missionary campaigns. I'd like to expand your horizons a bit and get you to see that the whole aim and purpose of God is to bring us to Christ - not once, but continually, daily, hour by hour, minute by minute. Just as a wildly spinning compass eventually points to true north, so the Holy Spirit is arranging our lives and ordering our steps so that we are constantly being brought back to our "true north", centered and focused on and into CHRIST, forever being made to see our sufficiency is of Him, that He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, that we are complete in Him, and seated with Him in the heavenly places. As believers, we ought always to encourage and exhort one another,

bringing the saint and the sinner alike BACK TO CHRIST (either for the first time or for the one thousandth time), back to their Source, back to their Life.

May I repeat my opening statement? The goal of all Spirit-led ministry is to bring people TO CHRIST, tenaciously, even relentlessly, making the most of every opportunity to give them the Testimony of Jesus Christ. Paul said we preach not of ourselves, but Christ. All attempts to gain a following unto ourselves must be ruthlessly stopped. There can be no place for glorying in our selves, or in the works of our hands. If our ministry, work, or service does not continually give Christ the preeminence, if it does not constantly point away from us and unto Him, then we cannot call what we are doing the Lord's work. There is but one work, and that work is to bring people to Christ - from the most wicked pagan to the most holy saint - and away from man.

A WORD TO MINISTERS

When Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel in Lystra, God confirmed their message by healing a lame man. The people saw this and made preparations to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas as an act of worship to them. How did the apostles respond? The Scripture says they ripped their clothing in despair and sought to direct the worship away from them and onto the Lord. They restrained the people from making sacrifices in their honor. How glorious! How awesome! What a precious, godly example we have in these two brothers. Let us steadfastly resist any effort of man to lift us up or deify us.

Permit me to say something to you pastors, teachers, and ministers who are in the public eye, whether you are well-known or little known, international or local. If you are a true man or woman of God you will lead people away from you and bring them to Christ. Some of you don't actually expect people to glorify you, but you don't go out of your way to prevent them from glorifying you either. Your passive acceptance of the adoring crowds is taking the preeminence away from Christ. If you continue in this course you will lose whatever spiritual ground you may have gained in your ministry. I counsel you to repent, rip your clothing, and exhort your followers to get their eyes off you and onto Christ. You are nothing. If you had faithfully lifted Him up to begin with you wouldn't be in the precarious place you find yourself in now. Repent, and resolve to give Him the preeminence from henceforth, even if it means losing your ministry.

We cannot help it when people offer up sacrifices to us in the heat of the moment, but we don't have to stand there and let them do it either. Paul and Barnabas demonstrated with word and with deed that they were only servants of the Most High. Later on, when the Corinthians were claiming to be followers of Paul, of Peter, or of Apollos, Paul was faithful to call them away from themselves. "Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? Who is Peter? Were we crucified for you? Were you baptized into our name?" Paul never failed to give Christ the preeminence in all things. That's why his ministry is still bearing fruit today. A ministry built around some man or some woman will only last a few years beyond their death.

Of course, Paul did say, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." But note how he qualified his words. It is very clear. He says follow me AS I follow Christ. Not "follow me because I am the Apostle Paul". At any moment a young Christian could look at Paul and see if Paul was following Christ. If Paul was following Christ, then he knew it was safe to follow Paul. If Paul was not following Christ, then they were under no obligation to follow Paul anymore. Paul says in effect that the moment Christ is no longer preeminent in my life, stop following me. How glorious this is! In another place he says, "Those things which you have learned, received, heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you." And what did Paul do? "This ONE THING I do: forgetting the past and reaching forward, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. I rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in myself. I am a dead man walking, and my real life is in Christ. I boast about my weaknesses."

Let me say something about this man Paul. He was consumed by Christ, and only a man so consumed is fit to be an example worth following. His happiest letter, Philippians, was written from jail. His body bore no less than 195 angry red scars received from being scourged five separate times with thirty-nine lashes each, not to mention the contusions, lacerations, and broken bones he received from being stoned and left for dead, beaten with rods, and nearly torn limb from limb by angry mobs. It is safe to follow a man who bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. His wounds are his credentials.

This man has seen Someone. I want to know what drives a man to die daily for what he believes. This is something supernatural. This goes beyond a little goosebump on Sunday morning, or a little tingle or jingle we feel from time to time when the music gets real good. Paul had a goal and a purpose, something worth living for, something worth dying for; and that was to be into Christ, and bring people to Christ. He said "follow me as I follow Christ," but he never looked backward to count how many were behind him. He knows where he is going, and if you want to get there, you'll follow or be left

behind. He is single-minded in his passion for Christ.

THE GIFT OF MINISTRY

I would like us for a moment to not think about ministry gifts and think instead of the gift of ministry. Your God-given ability to serve is in and of itself a gift, since most people want to BE served. There is much talk about the five (or four) -fold ministry gifts. People want to know what their gift is so they will have something to put on their business card. They want something printed in gold on the front of their Bible. I saw a Bible like that once and the gold title and name was so long it barely fit on the cover.

I have never been able to figure out what my ministry gift is. It used to be a source of frustration to me. One minute I think I'm a teacher, then someone says I have a pastor's heart, someone else says I have an evangelist's mouth, another says I have a prophet's scowl, and another says I have an apostle's revelation. I'm not sure what should go on my business card.

I finally realized it didn't matter! I started becoming preoccupied with the Gift instead of the gifts! My Gift is Christ: possessing Him, I have all (yet not I, but Christ in me). So whatever else I may be is up to the Lord, and He will work it out as He sees fit. Having never met you, I can tell you right away that your Gift is Christ. Of course, how that Gift expresses Himself through you will be something for you to discover. I only encourage you not to put Him into a ministerial box, saying, "I am thus and so, and so I can never be this or that." Friend, you are nothing, and He is all, and one never knows how He will use a yielded vessel.

But for the purpose of our discussion, let's take what we have learned so far, look at it in the context of the five-fold/four-fold services and see what we should be looking for in someone who claims to be a teacher, pastor, evangelist, prophet, or apostle. Remember, the goal of every Spirit-led ministry is to bring people to Christ: continually pointing away from itself, diverting and directing all attention onto Him. Concerning the so-called ministry gifts, the Scriptures tell us that they are given "for the edification (the building up into Christ) of the saints." So let's take a closer look at them.

TEACHER

How does the teacher approach ministry? The teachers will realize that they have nothing to teach except what the Spirit is teaching, for He is the Teacher, and He is Truth. They will not come to the Body and give out a plethora of messages, thoughts, opinions, and think so's. If they look to the Spirit for words, and the Spirit is going to always testify of Christ, what do you expect the teaching will do? It will bring people into a deeper knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

One should not presume to teach the Body as one would teach a high school or college class. We do not teach in order to impress others with a fleshly display of knowledge. The teacher is not merely performing an academic exercise with the students, but is bringing people further into Christ through the teaching of the Scripture, speaking Spirit and Truth Word which will impart Life to the listeners. When we speak we must decide whether we will talk out of our head or out of our spirit. The former is concerned with imparting head knowledge, while the latter is concerned with revelation. The first is a dead thing while the second is Life for the Body.

At some point we have to stop dissecting the nutritional value of the food before us, analyzing the menu, studying it under a microscope, and exchanging recipes. The Body needs tangible meat, bread, water, milk and honey. Strive towards actually feeding people instead of just talking about the food and drink. People are starving. GIVE them the Life first, then analyze it all you wish.

I used to murmur and complain that "no one" wanted to hear my message. That may be true if we are bringing a message other than Christ. But if we speak Christ then everyone wants to hear it, whether they realize it or not. People are dying for the Word of Life which you carry. It is true that everyone will not listen, but anyone might, and somebody will.

You may not be able to describe the difference in words, but just listen to a few people teach and you will quickly know who has the revelation of Christ and who does not. Either there is Life or there is no Life. You either leave feeling as though you have eaten a full meal, or you leave feeling as though you are still hungry. May God show us the difference.

PASTOR

How does the pastor approach ministry? He (or she) will realize that the Lord is the Pastor / Shepherd, and they are und

ershepherds, little more than an elder sheep themselves. Of course, someone with a pastor's heart (whether they are recognized as a pastor or not) will watch over the sheep, love, protect, and encourage them at every opportunity.

Oh, there have been so many abuses of the flock among so-called shepherds. Some wolves have snuck in unawares and devoured part of the flock. How can we discern a real pastor? By realizing there is more to pastoring than watching over the sheep. A real pastor will direct the sheep to the Good Shepherd, bringing them to Christ, leading them along the narrow path and into the fold so there will be One Flock under One Shepherd. Please read John 10 and pay particular attention to the phrase "one flock and one shepherd" in verse 16.

As you can see, being a pastor is more than having my own little flock with myself as their own little shepherd. Once we see there is truly only One Flock and One Shepherd it will instantly clear up issues concerning who, where, or how we should meet. How simple this is. It eliminates all denominational and doctrinal prejudices. It does away with the competitive spirit and enlarges our hearts towards the saints wherever they may be found, both within and without the camp. We will receive all whom the Lord receives instead of filtering people through theological and doctrinal tests before we will fellowship with them. Let us not call "unclean" what God has called "clean". I pray the Lord will open our eyes to see before God we are but One Flock under One Shepherd.

A shepherd is a sheep-herder, and he herds sheep. Where does he herd them to? Into the One Flock under the One Shepherd, for the sheep are scattered all over the face of the earth and divided into their own sects and peculiarities. The One Flock is the Ecclesia, the called-out assembly of those who have the revelation of Christ, and the One Shepherd is Christ Himself. There is no other. Meditate on that and broaden your vision to encompass more than your little four walls.

We are One Flock in Christ, and all the sheep belong to the Good Shepherd. Nothing belongs to us. If you think you own even one little ewe lamb you are laboring under delusions of grandeur. How ridiculous to talk about one pastor stealing another pastor's sheep, as if they belonged to one or the other to begin with!

The Lord Jesus did not tell Peter to go out and gather together some sheep who would elect Peter their shepherd. Three times the Lord said, "Feed My lambs!" Whose lambs? "MY LAMBS!" says the Good Shepherd. The sheep belong to Him, so be careful how you treat them, or you will discover that the Lord has more than one use for His rod and His staff.

Again, the object is to bring people to Christ, not to gather them together into tiny little folds in your own name and for your personal benefit. Alas, some will not embrace the vision of One Flock and One Shepherd because to embrace such a vision means their selfish ambition will have to die. They will view this as a great personal loss. But the ones who know God realize that it is a tremendous gain, for in giving up their own little flock they gain the whole Kingdom.

EVANGELIST

How does the evangelist approach ministry? Well, if the whole object is only to have some meetings, preach some messages, have some altar calls, and record some decisions, then it falls short of bringing people to Christ. Why? Because anyone can go forward when their emotions are aroused and make a profession of faith. Many will say, "Lord, Lord" and have the Lord reply, "Who are you? I do not know you."

An evangelist brings the Good News. What is the Good News? The Good News is it is complete, it is finished, it is accomplished, it is summed up in Christ. If our Good News is that you can miss hell and go to heaven, it is not much different than any other religion on the face of the earth. No, our Good News revolves entirely around a God-Man. No one else can make this claim. The Testimony of Jesus is the exclusive inheritance of the Ecclesia.

Remember the case of Phillip the evangelist and the Ethiopian prince? The Spirit of the Lord led Phillip to a certain place where he fell into step with the prince's caravan. There he heard the prince reading aloud from the chapter 53 of the prophet Isaiah. Phillip, seizing the opportunity, asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The prince invited him to take a place beside him. What did Phillip do then? Starting with that passage he went through the entire Old Testament and brought him to Christ. And I don't mean he got him to pray the sinner's prayer. He literally brought the man to Christ. Thank God he didn't talk about joining the church in Jerusalem, or planting a "seed-faith gift" into his own ministry, or walking the aisle, or signing a decision card. He preached Christ. The result being that the prince came to the Lord of his own free will, was baptized, and went away rejoicing.

Jesus, speaking to the woman at the well, said, "If you knew the Gift of God, and Who it is that is speaking to you, you w

ould have asked, and He would have given you Living Water." If you only knew! This is what evangelism seeks to do. The evangelist has a knack for bringing people to Christ (saved or not) by making the most of every opportunity. Christ indeed was the Master Evangelist. He talked about water, seed, vines, wind, rain, birds, flowers, rocks, fish, bread, whatever He could use from the raw elements of the environment He found Himself in. He spoke to the crowds in the Temple, from a boat, inside a house, on a hillside, on a mountain, by the lake, by the river. He was everywhere, proclaiming the Good News about Himself.

"The Kingdom of God is like a man on a journey... a farmer sowing seed... a fisherman casting his net... a woman baking bread..." The Lord seems to have an endless supply of illustrations and parables. In my heart I believe this is the genuine gift of evangelism, the aliveness to every opportunity and every means available for bringing people to Christ through the Good News, whetting their appetite for the things of God, fishing for the souls of men and women. If you absolutely must have a stage, bright lights, and organ music to accomplish this then I don't think you have the gift.

PROPHET

How does the prophet approach ministry? He (or she) realizes that the Testimony of Jesus is the inspiration of all prophetic utterance. So the prophet will be someone who knows the Lord through many seasons of breaking down and building up, that the Testimony of Jesus will not only be in their mouth but in their PERSON. The prophet does not just bring a message, he or she IS the message. And the message is Christocentric.

John the Baptist was a prophet of God, but not because he could deliver a thunderous word from the Lord. I don't recall that he ever made a single prediction apart from the revelation of Christ. Everything about John the Baptist was a message. His clothing was a message from God; he didn't just decide one day to start dressing a certain way. His diet of locusts and wild honey was a message from God, not his natural preference. His method of baptism was a message, not just a new method to get attention. His location by the Jordan was a message of great significance. His demeanor was a message. Here is a man who has been thoroughly dealt with by the Lord. It was not enough to hear what he had to say, you had to experience the man himself. This is where "Internet Prophets" are going to have a hard time. It is not your word, but your spirit, which really matters.

Now what was John's message? He only had one thing to say: repent, and get ready for the coming of One who is mightier than I. He is proclaiming Christ Jesus, not himself. He is bringing us the revelation of Christ. Now what is his philosophy of ministry? "I must decrease, and He must increase." This nicely sums up what we are endeavoring to tell you in so many words. Please note again that the actual minister fades into the background as the preeminence is given to Christ. The vessel is overshadowed and lost altogether in the bright light of His Son. Oh, for a clear prophetic word from a man or a woman who is not trying to have the preeminence!

APOSTLE

How does the apostle approach ministry? Again, we return to Paul as an example of what an apostle is. What was his commission? What did God command him to do? "I have revealed Myself to you for this purpose: to make you a minister and a witness of the things which you have seen of Me and the things which I will reveal to you (cf. Acts 26:16)."

The Greek word "apostolos" means "sent one". The apostle is sent as a witness to the revelation of Christ. What is a witness? A witness is someone who has seen something firsthand. To repeat something in court that you have not observed yourself is known as hearsay. It is inadmissible. But a witness testifies as to what he has seen and heard.

By their own laws, the Jews were commanded to accept the testimony of two or three witnesses as truth. Peter and John gave expert testimony that Jesus is the Christ. But the Jews would not listen. Instead, they commanded Peter and John to stop preaching and teaching in the Name of Jesus. Observe their response to this edict: "We cannot help but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Again, the revelation of Jesus is a matter of seeing.

We may also see that the apostle is something like a teacher, pastor, evangelist, and prophet all rolled into one. This does not make them into great ones, it simply means they have been brought down to such a low place of obscurity that they are hardly recognizable anymore. They are led by the Spirit to plunge headlong into whatever task the Church needs them for. Apostles do more than build churches, they build up the Church. Please be careful to see the distinction. Their work is directed towards the entire Body of Christ, which is why they cannot settle down into one location for very long. Apostles are sent forth with a revelation that is larger than themselves. You can no more contain THEM than they can contain IT.

Persecute apostles in one city and they just go on to the next. Send them into exile and they receive more revelation. Put them in jail and they will commence to writing Scripture. Put them on trial and it becomes a pulpit. Send them to their death and they will convert the executioners. True apostles cannot be silenced. Do you think Nero silenced Paul just by chopping off his head? By no means. Paul is still speaking and bearing witness for Christ through his writings. Being dead he yet speaks. Hallelujah!

Brothers and sisters, let us be faithful to the Lord and to His Body. Whatever He has given you to do, do it with all of your might, working not from your own limited strength, but working according to His Power which works in you mightily! Be released man of God! Be released, woman of God! Take heed to the ministry which He has called you to, that you fulfill it, and fulfill it to the fullest measure. Bring people to Christ, and enter the depths with them. Forget the past, and press forward onward and upward towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. Faithful is He Who calls you, and He will do it. Amen.