

Resolved, Msg. #3: "Output"
2 Corinthians 5:11-21
January 10, 2010
The Summit Church (BCAM Campus)

Slide: Danny Franks, Brier Creek Campus Pastor

Good morning, Summit Church. Today we are finishing up a three week series called "Resolve." I am very excited you are here today, because I can say with all confidence that this is the best sermon you've heard me preach so far this decade. It's a fact.

Before we get started, I want to update you on our Christmas Missions Offering. As most of you know, we set a goal this year of \$245,000. And as one of your pastors, I'll give you the inside track and tell you that may have been an unwise goal to set. If you remember, back in August we took up a special missions offering to help jump start the placement of some of our church planters overseas, and THEN you gave somewhere around \$70,000. So in this down economy, we should have exercised more wisdom and realized that trying to raise almost a quarter million more was pretty unrealistic.

And I'm here to tell you that it *was* unrealistic and we unfortunately did *not* hit the \$245k mark. [pause] We actually went *way over* the \$245k mark. Summit, over the last five weeks you have given a total of **\$261,686.76** to missions. Let me remind you that every cent goes beyond our walls and funds ministries here in Durham and the Triangle, church-planting efforts throughout North America and around the globe. But that's not all...also in December, you gave over **\$243,000** to Believe, our mission expansion project which is allowing us to grow as a church here in RDU. And THAT'S not all...you *also* gave the largest monthly offering in our church's history to our general budge - over **\$467,000** which allowed us to surpass all of our budgeted ministry goals for 2009. All in all, during the month of December, which is a tight month, it's an economically difficult month, it's a month when every retailer out there has a great plan for your money - you gave nearly ONE MILLION DOLLARS to the mission of the gospel of Jesus. Thank you for giving, thank you for your generosity, and thanks be to God for supplying us with every need!

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Two weeks ago we started this series by talking about "Input" - the spiritual discipline of reading and applying scripture in our lives. Last week Pastor Jerome reminded us of the discipline of remembering that our identity is found solely in the gospel of Jesus, and not through self-help or relationships or career. Today, we finish up by talking about "Output" - or the discipline of evangelism.

Now, for some of you something funny just happened when I said the word "evangelism." If this were a party this would be the point where the music would screech to a halt and everybody stops dancing and just stares silently at the guy who walked into the room with a burning goat or something like that. Because when I said "evangelism," some of you had a flurry of mental images that popped into your brain. What *I* mean when I talk about evangelism is this: **evangelism is communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who are far from Him.**

But that's not necessarily the *first* definition or example that we think of, is it? A lot of us have years of pre-conceived ideas of what evangelism is. Maybe you remember the traveling evangelist that always came to your church when you were a kid - you know, that guy whose comb-over was so bad that if you looked at it from above it looked like a spider holding an egg. [convo]

If you're a college student, maybe evangelism makes you think about the guy that shares the warm and fuzzy love of Jesus by getting red faced and screaming at you and your friends in the quad, using helpful phrases like, "You'd better turn or you're gonna burn..." "You'd better get right or get left..." "Ya gotta get sanctified or you're gonna be French fried..." "You'd better quit fakin' or you're gonna be bacon..."

So, there are basically two huge disclaimers that I have to give you as we get started, because the fact is, for many of us that word "evangelism" carries a lot of baggage. The first disclaimer is this...

Most of our [so-called] "evangelism" deserves the bad reputation it has received.

A couple of years ago my wife and I were driving down I-40 heading back to Durham. And you know that feeling you have when you just *know* deep within your heart of hearts that somewhere in the universe, there's a "Hot Donuts Now" sign that's lit up? Well we had that feeling. So we pulled off onto an exit we've never been on before, and Jehovah Jireh, there's a Krispy Kreme. It's like we had some sort of God-given sugar glaze radar.

So we get our half-dozen - one for her, five for me, and we're waiting at a red light to get back on the interstate, and out of my window I notice a guy standing in the median. Or actually, he was sitting in the median, in a big lawn chair. Now you have to get the picture. He's this really old guy, like 47 or something like that (it's looking younger all the time). He's sitting in the middle of four lanes of traffic, and he has a sandwich board beside him with what looked like the entire Old AND New Testament printed in 6 pt font. He is talking into a little Fisher Price microphone and amplifier set - well, I said he's talking - but in reality, and so help me I'm not making this up...he has a ventriloquist dummy sitting on his lap who I guess is doing the talking for him.

I looked at Merriem and said, "That's something you definitely don't see every day." So like a good pastor I cracked my window a couple of inches so I could make fun of him in front of all of you. And this guy was preaching some judgment on the greater Triad area. And the obvious thought is how sad it is that THAT is mainstream America's view of the gospel. Some angry white guy yelling at complete strangers, using ridiculous techniques, and honestly, leaving you wondering which one is the real dummy.

The fact is, many people don't understand the true gospel, and the reason is because of the way the gospel is presented. I have no doubt that there are many of you here that wouldn't consider yourself a Christian. But if you're not a Christian, there's a *reason* you're not a Christian. As a matter of fact, you're skeptical of the whole Christian thing. Maybe you attended this morning out of curiosity or just to get a friend off your back.

Let me speak to you for just a moment: what you've seen in modern day evangelism is often times misguided. To be honest, we just get it wrong. We take a beautiful message and we stink it up with our own agenda and our holier than thou attitude. So if you came expecting to hear that today, let me go ahead and let you off the hook. Instead of listening to another religious person yell at you, you're going to get to hear a preacher yell at religious people. And I have to tell you, I'm kind of looking forward to it...it's gonna be fun. So you if you want to join me in my protest against business-as-usual religious people, feel free to stand up on your chair and say "That's right!" or maybe just wrestle somebody's Bible from their hands and smack 'em with it.

Here's the second disclaimer, related to the first: **most Christians keep quiet because we don't want to BE one of "those people."** For you Christians here, I'll tell you that I sympathize with you. I understand the fear of being misunderstood or labeled as preachy. I know what it's like to be tongue tied when you're trying to explain the clear message of the gospel. I grew up in a church where we had weekly visitation, where we would cold-call people at their house...which is when you walk up to a total stranger's door and knock on it. And I was always the guy in the group who was praying and fasting that no one would be home. Even now as a pastor, I'm far more prone to keep quiet than I am to share the message that I *know* can change people's lives. I don't want to rock the boat, I don't want to offend, and in my quest to protect my reputation I end up squandering the greatest assignment I've ever been given.

For those of you in that same camp, my hope today is that you'll see what *real* evangelism is. It's not about a specific technique, it's not about knowing all the answers, it's not about taking some self-help course to build your confidence and help you start conversations, it's about finding common ground and building relationships with people and introducing them to a transforming relationship with Christ.

The apostle Paul identified these issues in 2 Corinthians 5. Let me ask you to turn there, and as you do, I'll set up the introduction to the story. Paul has just spent several paragraphs of his letter to the Corinthians talking about the fragile nature of the human life. He reminds us of the fact that one day we will draw our last breath and our heart will pump for the final time. I've spent time this week by several bedsides of people who understand that. I've prayed for pregnant couples who are uncertain about the health of their unborn child. I've listened to doctors talk about people's life span in terms of weeks and not years. You don't have to open your eyes too wide to realize that we are in bodies that are temporary. And that's what Paul was reminding his friends in Corinth. For all of us, there will be a final day where earth ends and eternity begins. And all of us will spend eternity somewhere.

So in 2 Cor. 5, verse 11, Paul builds on that reminder and tells us,

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord [and I would add, knowing our own mortality and the brief nature of life of those around us] we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves [in other words, if our technique or our method is just a little odd] it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Here's the first point that Paul makes: **Our message is fueled by love.** Let me say that again: our message *must* be fueled by love. Have you noticed that people can smell it when you don't love 'em? People can see through it when evangelist

comb-over boy is preaching **at** them rather than talking **to** them. Your friends know it when you're evangelizing them out of guilt or duty or self-righteousness as opposed to engaging them in love.

Don't make a mistake - we definitely have a mandate. And that mandate has an unmistakable urgency to it. Verse 14 says that **the love of Christ controls us**. If we really understand the message, we can't help but share it. But it's not about checking something or someone off of a to do list. Yes, some of us will have those airplane conversation or those God-scheduled moments where we are able to share the gospel with a complete stranger. That happens often. But for the vast majority of us, God is calling us to take the message to those whom we already have a relationship with. You can't fake love and you can't con people with concern. We remember what God did for us, therefore we do all we can to share it with others. If what the Bible says is true, then I can't call myself a friend and not share this. "I passionately believe but don't share" - that's inconsistent and hypocritical.

I fear that we are missing the vital element of humility in modern-day evangelism. Just because we understand the greatest truth the world has ever known doesn't mean that we charge in with all guns blazing. You see this element of humility modeled by Jesus himself. He saved his scathing rebuke for who? The religious people. But to everyone else, he was kind, he was compassionate, he had an attractive rather than a repulsive personality. And yes, he would challenge their world view, but did it in a way that showed his love and humility. When we display Christ's humility, we will draw people towards Jesus.

Paul goes on to say in v. 16: **From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh** [again, it's not about living for ourselves or living for today, but recognizing that we are eternal beings]...we regard no one according to the flesh, **Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him this no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All of this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.**

The second thing Paul reminds us is that **we have to talk about the message, not about our mission**. Putting it another way, the center of evangelism is an announcement of what God did for us, not a list of instructions of what we do for him. He talks about this ministry of reconciliation, which is simply this...you ready? Big theology in 30 seconds. God created us to have a relationship with him. We rebelled against God. God sent Jesus into the world to live a perfect life and to take all of our sins on himself. At the cross, Jesus paid for our sins and if we accept his payment, if we enter into a relationship with him, we are no longer enemies of God, but sons of God. That's what it means to be reconciled - to make the relationship right again.

And once we are reconciled, God says that we are given the ministry of reconciliation. We take what we have learned about the truth of the gospel and we share it with others. Now, I wouldn't suggest starting off the conversation with your friends by saying, "Hey, did you know that you're an enemy of God and the way it stands right now you're going to burn in hell forever?" That may not be the best ice breaker.

But what often happens is we forget that we are not the ones who do the reconciling, we simply have the ministry of reconciliation. When we get those two things turned around, that's where the fun begins. That's when you see the ugly side of evangelism. It becomes more about you and less about Jesus. It turns the focus on your self righteousness and away from God's ability to make people right.

And again, you know these people. You know the ones who view themselves as the ones who do the reconciling rather than having the ministry of reconciliation. They're the preachy, holier-than-thou, disapproving, legalistic, rules-driven guy. Maybe it's your aunt who is always disappointed in your moral behavior. Maybe it's the person at your office who starts praying and crossing themselves when someone talks about Friday night's party. Hey, maybe it's YOU.

And I always am amused when these people run into some pushback because of their misguided religious code. They'll say things like, "Well, I'm just being persecuted because I'm a Christian." No, you're being persecuted because you're a jerk. I mean, I'm on your team and I don't even like being around you.

Us Christians have to learn that **people aren't changed by rules, but they can be transformed by grace**. When we hold up the grace of Jesus and what he freely gave us, that's a different message than telling people they'd better clean up their act.

Let me go off task for a moment. That's why as a church, we encourage you to get out of your Christian bubble and into the community. It's why our small groups and ministry teams have adopted school classrooms and in some cases, entire schools. It's why we partner with ministries like Pregnancy Support Services and Habitat for Humanity. It's why our small groups meet in your neighborhoods where unchurched people live and not behind the safe walls of this building. We want to be the church where we live.

Way too many of us live in a spiritual ghetto. We spend all our time at church and Bible studies and we only shop at Christian bookstores and the only place we ever eat is at Chick-Fil-A on Tuesday mornings when the Christian Mommies Club is there. It's as if we're afraid that non-Christian people carry incurable cooties and we don't want to have anything to do with them.

Did you know it's really hard to love non-Christians if you never spend time with them? We're really serious about wanting you to get your hands dirty in the community and engage the culture and serve people out of love. And you're not serving them so that you can mark a notch in your evangelism belt. No, you serve them because that's what Jesus modeled for us.

Not everyone that Jesus served became a Christian. Think about that. The nine lepers he healed, the rich young ruler who walked away...they rejected his message. And if he was really God, he KNEW they would reject his message. But he served them anyway.

As a church, we don't serve in order to convert, but because we are converted, we selflessly serve the underserved in our community. We give to those who can't give us anything in return. That quarter-million you gave to missions? A portion of that goes to relieve suffering in our community and all over the world. Not everyone will receive the gospel. There are even situations where we can't explicitly share the gospel. But we can certainly demonstrate the love of the gospel. The work of grace-centered evangelism falls to us. The result of evangelism is left to the power of the Holy Spirit.

V. 20 says, **"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."**

Paul says that we are Christ's ambassadors. What is an ambassador? If you move to Kenya and work in the American embassy, you are *not* America, but you *represent* America. Your power doesn't rest in your position, but you represent the power of the entity that sent you. Paul's point is this: **The message doesn't represent us; we represent the message and it's transforming power.**

Now, points 2 and 3 are sort of similar, but I want to make sure you understand this. Point 2 was that it's not about you. Point 3 is that it IS about Jesus. It's about Jesus. It's all about Jesus.

I want you to soak in that for a minute. Maybe you've never thought about evangelism that way. Some of you are still waiting with your pen ready to write down a technique. You're hoping I'm going to give you some sort of acrostic or memory trick or set of Bible verses or teach you how to have a hideous comb-over, and that will make you a more effective evangelist. But the technique is not the point. Jesus is the point.

Paul said it dozens of times in his letters: I don't preach about techniques. I don't preach about rules. I don't talk about do's and don't's. I talk about Jesus. It's all about Jesus. It's about Jesus living for us, dying for us, and us being reconciled to him. That's it. That's the gospel.

Do you understand what that does? That takes the pressure off of us. We don't have to memorize stuff. We don't have to remember what the "T" stands for in our acrostic gospel presentation, we don't have to ask really awkward canned questions that sound more like robots and less like our normal interactions with people...we just talk about Jesus.

Now I want to be very, very careful at this point. Yes, you talk about Jesus, but your content still has to be accurate. If you present Jesus as one way among many ways to God, you're not really talking about Jesus. If you talk about all Jesus has done but never challenge your friend to start a relationship with Jesus, you're not really sharing the gospel with them. The gospel always calls for the question. It always challenges a decision.

When you're talking about Jesus, you want to remember three things. I'll put these on the screen for a while, but I'm going to talk through them rapid fire and move on. An evangelistic conversation is **content-driven** (in other words, you're sticking with the truth of the Bible and the true message of the gospel). It has to be **Jesus-centered** (we are reconciled by Jesus, not by our own good works, not by deciding to clean up our lives, not by anything that we can do, but by accepting what Jesus has done). And it needs to be **action-oriented** (eventually, you have to call for the question. You can talk, you can discuss, you can have a friendly debate, you can seek to understand their point of view, but eventually you have to invite them to follow Jesus.)

I'm afraid that we have made evangelism too big of a deal in our day. Don't get me wrong - evangelism is a very big deal. It means heaven or hell for people. You are talking about eternal issues. But Jesus and Paul never talk about evangelism as a detached subset of our lives. In the Great Commission, Jesus tells us to go into all the world and make disciples. Maybe a better way of putting that word "Go" is "As you are going..." In other words, in your every day life, in your every day

relationships, in your every day encounters and interactions, carry the gospel. Talk about Jesus. Present Jesus. Preach Jesus. Make much of Jesus.

That's why the subtitle of this series is "The End of Self Help." It's not about *you* transforming people's lives; it's about *Jesus* transforming people's lives. It may be that you or I can say or do something that can temporarily help their marriage or their parenting or their identity, but what's better is if we can point people to the one that will change their eternity.

Finally let me give you the final point. This is one that speaks to me every bit as much as it might speak to you. Because when it's all said and done, we still don't get it done, do we? We can listen to a message like this and either get excited or get guilty, but for most of us we'll forget both by about 3:00 this afternoon. My goal today is not to establish for you another item to check off, but to remind us of the message we get to share. Because **when we don't share the message, we demonstrate spiritual amnesia.**

When we are not talking about what Jesus does for people, it's an indicator that we've forgotten about what Jesus has done for us. Look at verse 21, maybe the greatest verse in 2 Corinthians:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Did you see that? Three words at the beginning you can't miss. *For our sake*. God sent Jesus for us. Jesus suffered for us. He died on the cross for us. He took his perfect life and his heavenly pedigree and he traded it in for our own sin. It's what writers call "the great exchange." He took our unrighteousness and traded it for his righteousness. That's how we can say that the Christian life is not about do's and don't's but about what Jesus has done for us. The gospel has changed me, it's changed my marriage, my family, my friendships.

Do you understand that? Do you really remember the truth of the gospel and what Jesus did for you? If you do - if *I* do - then why are we sitting on the message? Why wouldn't we engage people with the greatest story ever? Why wouldn't we challenge people's incorrect assumptions about Jesus? Why wouldn't we introduce them to a relationship with him?

Some of you are here, and this is the first time that you've ever really understood the gospel. And for the first time you recognize that being a Christian is not about being a member of a church. It's not about being a moral person. It's about accepting what Jesus did for you on the cross. Maybe today, this message about evangelism has first taken root in your own need for the gospel. If that's you, let me encourage you - *don't ignore it*. Don't let this moment pass.

Right now - at this moment - you can begin a relationship with Jesus. There in your seat, you can repeat these words - Jesus, I don't know you. But I want to know you. I accept the gift of salvation that you gave on the cross. I confess that I have been living as your enemy. I ask that you would forgive my sins and begin to transform my life. Thank you for making me a Christian. Amen.

For you, I want to ask that on your worship guide, you would mark the box that says, "I prayed to begin a relationship with Jesus." We'll follow up with you and get you the information you need. You can attend our Starting Point event here in just a few minutes and we'll connect you with someone who can talk to you and give you some resources.

For the rest of us, maybe we need to repent of our apathy. Maybe we need to repent of squandering our greatest mission. Many of you have already had the face of that friend in your mind. Today's the day to be more intentional about introducing the gospel into your conversations. Some of us are simply living in the Christian bubble - we need to intentionally seek relationships where we can share the grace of the gospel.

I want to pray for you. As I pray, you pray with me. Don't listen...participate. Ask God to show you people that he is already working on. Give those people to him. Give your fears to him. Give your apathy to him. And prepare for what Jesus is going to do as you authentically live and proclaim the gospel to others.

PRAY

Now, you have the chance to apply this message in a couple of ways. A few of you are still stunned because I didn't bring out a chart teaching you to share the gospel. For you, all this week on the **campus blog**, we're going to be giving you the director's cut of this message. Every day will be some very practical tips for you. And every day we'll be giving away some more resources. Free stuff. Do it.

The next way to apply begins next week. We want to partner with you in bringing your friends to Jesus. You need to do the groundwork in your everyday relationships, but you also want to get them to church. Beginning next week we're starting a brand-new series that will be perfect for your unchurched friends. Let me direct your attention to the screen as Pastor J.D. explains it a bit more...