

Windows in Heaven

I. Slide1 **Announce:**

- A. Slide2 Men's breakfast - it's not too late.
- B. Slide3 Movie Night - see Susan Wells. Only 20 left.

II. **Intro:**

- A. A Syrian invasion had reduced Israel to desperate straits.
 1. Famine, a normal by-product of prolonged warfare, gripped the land & raised prices of staples far beyond the reach of ordinary people.
 2. The outrageous cost of undesirable food sources [donkey head, dove's dung 6:25]
- B. The king of Israel, *Joram*, had tore his clothes & even wore sackcloth, but God wasn't impressed as long as his heart was *hardened*.

III. Slide4 **WINDOWS IN HEAVEN (1,2)**

- A. *Elisha promises* - not only would the siege be lifted but Israel's food supplies would return to normal.
 1. There will be abundant food for the famine-stricken city within 24 hours.
- B. **Windows of heaven** - lit. refers to *rainfall*. The objection here is that, *even if God brought rain today, grain could not be sold for such prices tomorrow*.
- C. **Dare to believe even to the opening of the heavens**. God's grace flings wide open the windows of heaven.
 1. **READ** Mal.3:8-10 [note: *if I will not open for you the windows of heaven*]

IV. Slide5 **THIS DAY IS A DAY OF GOOD NEWS (3-11)**

- A. Now from the viewpoint of ordinary citizens. Well, ok, 4 outcasts in society.
 1. And they figured, like it says in Eccl.9:4 *a living dog is better than a dead lion*.
- B. **Great logic** skills as they sit just outside the gate.
 1. Enter the city (not allowed) where there's a famine, we die.
 Stay here (at the gate/quarantined), we die.
 Surrender to the Syrian's, we may live or we may only die (but at least swiftly).

- a) They take option 3 and decide it was better *to eat as prisoners or die quickly, than to starve in freedom.*
2. But there was no enemy...they were gone. Scattered...by God. Scared them w/ a noise.
- a) God can feed His people with the treasures of the wicked, fleeing though no man pursues.
- b) Slide6a Does Ps.23 apply here? *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me...You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life.*
3. Here we have starving poor lepers, now gorging themselves on *Syrian hummus, falafels, baba ganoush, yogurt marinated chicken, rice :)*
- C. Slide6b (9) The lepers moved from giving up & giving in...to giving out.
1. This is the day of good news - do not keep the good news to yourself. Be sure to bear the glad tidings to others.
- D. The lepers were 1st in the deserted camp. And, the abundance was awaiting the starving populace, but only a few outcast tasted it.
1. So Christ's wealth and unsearchable riches are for all.
2. If we wait...count it a sin to hold your peace. [moral obligation to share the news]
3. Q: Is it a sin? Yes before God & your fellow man?
- a) Be sure to tell out what you know. It's the beauty of seeing others at the divine banquet.
- b) The lepers did it because they felt guilty & fear of punishment...*We should do it out of obedience, & a heart of love. We should do it for God's sake & for their sake.*
- c) We enjoy sharing helpful encouraging information...
- (1) We enjoy telling a person who is sick or hurting about a doctor who successfully treated us for the same ailment.
- (2) We enjoy recommending to a friend, a mechanic, who is good & honest.
- (a) But then often times we are less eager to share the best news in all the world that Christ can satisfy their spiritual hunger.

d) Slide6c *Sharing the good news is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Or, it's a Nobody, trying to tell Everybody, about Somebody, that can save Anybody.*

E. This also seems to be the experience of human life.

1. One day in *despair*, next day *satisfied* with all the the heart could wish.
2. God does open windows in heaven to *supply our need*.

F. *We do not become poor when we give.*

G. We have no right to keep to ourselves the bread of life, *for* lack of which *men Perish*.

1. If a **scientist** discovered the cure for cancer, we would expect the discovery to be shared with the world. *Basic ethics requires that good news not be kept secret.*
2. You and I have discovered that *salvation is found in Jesus Christ*. It is a *breakdown of basic integrity to keep that truth to ourselves.*
3. *If we have found the cure for a guilty conscience, if we found the food of life, we are obligated to share with others.* Haddon Robinson

V. Slide7 **TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE (12-20)**

A. *Too good to be true*...even though the man of God predicted this very thing.

B. (20) This officer **heard** the good news, he **saw** the proof of the message, **but** he died before he could *enjoy it*.

1. What a warning he becomes to *the sinner* who delays receiving Christ.

C. **Unbelievers can** *mark the lepers position*...**for** it is the same as *theirs*.

1. If you **remain** where you are...you must perish. If you **go to Jesus** you can't die (sp).
2. *"Nothing venture, nothing win,"* is the old proverb, and in your case the venture is a great one.

- a) If you sit still in despair, no one can pity you when your ruin comes. **But** if you die seeking mercy, if such a thing were possible, you would be the object of **universal sympathy**.
3. None escape who **refuse** to look to Jesus.
4. Lepers asked, **Why are we sitting here till we die?**
5. The Ninevites said, **Who can tell?** Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.
- a) Act upon the same hope, **and** try the Lord's mercy.

VI. Slide8 **STARTING SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS**

- A. This is **not** to teach a **technique**...**but** to ingrain a **lifestyle**.
1. **We** have choices in our conversations. **Jesus** *directed* his conversations.
 - a) **Woman at the well**: He did not **manipulate** her, **yet** neither did he allow her to get **off track**. He was not molded by her presuppositions. Allowed questions but always brought things back on track.
 - b) There is a world of difference between **persuasion & manipulation**.
 2. To have **purpose** & ultimate desires for a conversation, is **not wrong**.
 3. And, it's **not wrong** to learn a few principles of communication to help us get a conversation going. **Or**, to direct it toward spiritual matters.
- B. **Cultivating. Planting. Reaping.**
- C. Slide9a **Cultivating** - Preparing the Soil [**or**, Pre-Evangelism]
- D. We do this by *arousing the curiosity of the seeker* so they will **want** to hear the good news
- E. In this agricultural metaphor: the soil must be cultivated, **before** seed can be planted, **in order for** a harvest to be reaped. [*so Cultivating takes Investigating. Stimulating. Relating*]
1. **Investigating** - 1st discover who the person is. **This requires a genuine interest & curiosity in that person.**
 - a) Jesus was known as the friend of sinners. **Are you?**
 - b) He loved all types of people: **The clean & the dirty. The tidy & the messy.**
 - c) Learn to draw people out so that it becomes our **lifestyle** & not a **technique**.

2. **Stimulating** - Once you know who the person is, we must seek to arouse their curiosity about the gospel.

a) This is one of the most neglected aspects of evangelism...we try to saturate people w/information b4 we caught their attention.

b) **Note Jesus' fishing techniques:** [who often was deliberately vague & intriguing with people at 1st]

(1) Samaritan woman at well & *living water*. He knew she wouldn't understand living water.

(2) Jesus to Nic, *You must be born again*.

(3) Jn 5:6 (man w/38yr sickness @ pool of Bethesda) *Do you wish to be made well?*

(4) Lk.10:26 (Jesus to lawyer, *what I must I do to inherit eternal life?*) *What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?*

(5) (Philip to eunuch) Acts 8:30 *Do you understand what you are reading?*

3. **Relating** - Ok, so we discovered who they were, we piqued interest, then we are ready to **relate the gospel message**.

a) Don't take an interest in people in order to trick them into a conversation about Christ.

b) We want to *know & understand people* because **God loves them**. **Period!** **But** it's also because of God's love that we also desire to *share the good news of Christ*.

c) Some people walk away from their faith because they look back & feel they blindly accepted Christianity as a **child**. **But** maybe you can show them as an **adult** they have **blindly rejected faith**. [What is the one reason you don't believe in Jesus?]

F. **Slide9b Planting - Planting the Seed**. Announcing the gospel.

1. **Plant the Truth**. *Don't tamper with God's message*.

2. We want to make the gospel **viable** to the world **but** not **palatable**.

a) Donald Boloesch, The gospel is the *surprising movement* of God into human history recorded in the bible culminating in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus Christ & the *corresponding movement* of God in the personal history of those who believe.

b) So it's *declaring His message & also confessing & declaring our encounter with His message.*

3. **Plant His Love.** The church needs to learn how **not** to ***shrink back from naming sin & still be the bearers of grace.***

a) When it comes to sin we tend to either be **silent** or be **judgmental**.

b) We either convey a gospel of *warm feelings & cheap, sentimental grace;* **OR** we behave & speak in ways that appear *condescending, judgmental & critical.*

(1) Answer how do we talk about sin + God's love together: *Your style & substance*

G. **Slide9c Reaping - Pleading for a Commitment.** An appeal to the *will* to make a commitment to Christ

1. **Only God** can make him/her response **positive**.

a) It's possible the miracle of **conversion** is greater than **the creation** of the world...
Why? When God created the world, he had *no sinful opposition* to deal with.

2. What's really remarkable that He invites us to *partner with Him* in this process.

a) We not only have the honor to *share God's message* but we have the awesome privilege of *inviting a response.*

H. *Don't dump the gospel on someone...because no one likes to get dumped on.*

I. They should not feel like someone's **project**, but a **person** that is loved.

J. Develop authentic relationships.

K. *Does my life reflect only religious activity or does it bear the mark of profound love?*

L. Starting spiritual conversations is *a way of life* not a **program**.

M. Starting spiritual conversations is simply calling believers to live as true Christians.

When we live as we are called to be, evangelism can't help but happen.

N. Our message is **NOT** that *we have it all together*, but that we know One who does.

O. Our message is **NOT** *behave, then believe, then you can belong.*

P. Penetrate their mask. We all wear one.

Q. See anyone's sin (even the most vile) as them simply trying to fill their God-shaped vacuum.