

Sharing the Gospel (*Beautiful Feet*)

Romans 10:9-15 on October 22, 2023

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Please read Romans 10:9-15 before going further in this transcript.

Last week I got a really nice compliment from someone after the sermon. They said, “Pastor Jerry, you have beautiful feet.” You see, last week I had the privilege of preaching the good news of the gospel.

Those who share the gospel have beautiful feet. Romans 10:15 says, “...As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” “As it is written” is a reference to Isaiah 52:7, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” Isaiah originally referred to those who brought good news to the Jewish exiles: Bringing the good news that they’d be released from captivity in a foreign land!¹ Paul now applies this to the good news of the gospel, to Jews and Gentiles alike:² Bringing the good news that spiritually lost people can be released from their captivity to sin!³ This phrase, “bring good news” translates the Greek word, εὐαγγελίζω, which is where we get our English word “evangelize.”

To evangelize means to share the good news of the gospel, to bring it, to announce it, to proclaim it from the mountaintops!⁴ And that’s what each Christ-follower is called to do, proclaim the good news, bring it! Spiritually lost people won’t hear the good news, without one of us sharing it with them. Each one of us has been *SENT* to our families, to our friends, and to our neighbors, as a spokesperson for Jesus Christ. You see, pastors and other paid professionals aren’t the only ones who are called to have beautiful feet. Every deeply devoted follower of Jesus is called to have beautiful feet! So, how about it: How are your feet looking these days? Could they use a good “spiritual pedicure”?

Would you agree that the spiritually lost people in the Bemidji area need to hear the good news about Jesus? Colossians 3:5-9 reminds us Christians of what our lives were like before Christ rescued us:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.” These verses not only remind us, as Christ-followers, to put our earthly nature to death, but it also reminds us, that those who are spiritually lost, are still living in the grip of their earthly nature. You see, anyone who does not yet

¹ At that time in history, messengers were given the job of running back to the king and reporting the outcome a battle. And when the outcome was good news, that messenger’s feet were considered beautiful: we won!

² Romans 10:12-13 sets up the context for verses 14-15.

³ Isaiah 52:7 “refers to those who announce the good news that the exiled people of Israel will be able to return to their own land. Paul applies the verse to Christian preachers, who proclaim the ultimate ‘good news’ about God’s intervention on behalf of all people in Christ.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2311 footnote on Romans 10:15.

⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 402.

know Christ, has not, and cannot, put their earthly nature to death, so they're still trapped in the sins that belong to it; they are being held captive by sin.⁵ Now we used to be spiritually lost just like them, so it shouldn't be too difficult for us to empathize with their need to hear the good news of the gospel:

Good news that they can be set free from their captivity to sin.

Good news that a heavenly reward awaits.

Good news that when they go to work or school on Monday morning, the Lord will help them and guide them.

Good news that they no longer need to navigate the troubles of this world without hope.

Good news that their broken relationships can be rescued and restored through Jesus Christ.

Good news that they can be set free from addiction, whether it's an addiction to drugs or alcohol, or to sexual impurity, or to financial greed, or whatever else.

Good news that there's help available for their anger problem, or their filthy language, or their lying tongue.

Good news that they don't have to remain trapped in the sins and brokenness of their earthly nature, but that they can be set free and find new life in Christ!

Now this isn't to say that any of us believers have fully escaped from our old selves, but it is to say that at least we have a genuine level of relief from it. But not unbelievers, they're still fully trapped in sin, with no relief, day in and day out. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have something that unbelievers don't. And it's something that they desperately need, even if they don't know it yet. So we who are spiritually rich, need to share our gospel wealth, with those who are spiritually poor.⁶

Last month I started a class on evangelism with the Church Evangelism Institute. It's designed to help Lead Pastors do a better job in their own personal evangelism, and also to help them lead their churches in becoming better at evangelism. It's put together by the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center.⁷ The first book on my reading list is a book by Kevin Harney called *Organic Outreach for Churches*.⁸ This book has forced me to consider some fairly challenging questions:

- Is E-Free Bemidji deeply burdened and sincerely praying for the spiritually lost people in our community?
- Is each one of our church ministries willing to make strategic changes to improve our evangelistic impact?
- Are we loving one another well enough as a church family that nonbelievers long to be part of this family?

⁵ Verses 9-10 remind us that, thanks to the good news of the gospel, we've been blessed to take off our old self, and put on our new self. But, those who are apart from Christ, still have their old self on; they're still living under its full effects. They haven't yet taken off their old self, because they haven't yet been made new by the good news of Jesus Christ. See also 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; and Ephesians 2:1-4.

⁶ Although its more immediate context is financial wealth, 2 Corinthians 8:9 comes to mind, "For you know the graces of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

⁷ <https://wheatonbillygraham.com/church-evangelism-institute/>

⁸ Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.

- Are we willing to make sacrifices, and prioritize our time and energy, in order to reach the spiritually lost?
- Are the believers at E-Free Bemidji eager to pursue relationships with spiritually lost people?
- Is each deeply devoted follower of Jesus at E-Free well-equipped to share the good news of the gospel?

Oh how I wish that our answers to all of these questions could be a resounding “YES!” But I’m sorry to say that a number of our answers are probably not “yes,” especially not a resounding yes. The fact is, if our answers to all of these questions were a resounding yes, then we wouldn’t need this sermon. But we do need it. And to be completely transparent, I also need this sermon, just as much as anyone else.
>>> So what should we do about it!?

Kevin Harney gives this challenge: “When a congregation is in love with itself and is committed to self-preservation, it’s unlikely it will count the cost and take steps to reach out. But when the people in your church truly love others, that love drives them outward. When they love people so much that they hurt over their lost condition, they will do whatever it takes for those they love to taste the goodness of the gospel, and to experience the love of God. As the members of your church listen to the voice of Jesus saying, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ they will be compelled to look beyond the walls of the church and the circle of their church family. Love, inspired by the Spirit of God, propels us out of our comfort zones and into the world.”^{9 10 11} *Sharing the gospel outside our walls*... hum? That’s sounds familiar. It’s familiar because it’s what we talked about at our annual meeting earlier this year. The Lord seems to keep tapping our church on the shoulder and making us think about this idea. God loves lost people, and He is deeply concerned about their salvation. So much so that He sent His one and only Son Jesus Christ to rescue people from their sin. And since God is this concerned about people’s salvation, as His deeply devoted followers, we should be too.

With all of this in mind, let’s consider **three ways that we can improve our evangelistic effectiveness together:** First of all, we can...

I. Pray. Evangelism absolutely must begin with prayer! Human hearts cannot change apart from the supernatural power of God. God alone can transform us into new creations in Christ, so prayer is absolutely essential. We can begin by praying...

...for a burden for the spiritually lost. Romans 9:2 says, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.” How about you and me? Do we feel great sorrow and unceasing anguish over the unsaved condition of our family, friends, and neighbors? We also need to pray...

⁹ Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 29.

¹⁰ This makes me think of the old classic, “Out of the Saltshaker, and Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life,” by Rebecca Manley Pippert.

¹¹ My prayer for our church this past year has been that we’ll increase our vision for “Sharing the Gospel Outside Our Walls.” I talked about this at our Annual Meeting, and I’ll be talking about it again at our next Annual Meeting. And we’ll be talking about it more and more as we approach our church’s 100-year anniversary in 2024. We’ve made some good progress this year. Various ministries have been moving some of their programing out into the community. And various ministries within our church have been intentionally sharing personal testimonies of faith, and actively highlighting gospel invitations. This is all a good start, and yet, we still have a long way to go.

...for opportunities to share the gospel with the spiritually lost. Romans 11:13-14 says, "...I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them." Now let's be clear, when Paul talks about taking pride in his ministry, he's not suggesting that we should be prideful in our evangelism, but rather that we should take it seriously. What he's saying is that he gives his gospel ministry his best effort and full attention, in the hope that some will be saved. So how about you and me? Are we looking for gospel opportunities throughout our everyday lives? Are we giving evangelism our best effort and our full attention? Ultimately, we need to pray...

...for salvation of the spiritually lost. (That God would call them to Himself.) Romans 10:1 says, "...my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." How about you and me? Are we praying from a heart's desire for the lost to be found? Does that desire compel us to pray regularly and fervently "that they may be saved?"¹²

Another way to improve our evangelistic effectiveness is to...

II. Provide Bemidji with a loving, welcoming church. 99 years ago, God sent, our church, to this community. When Romans 10:15 talks about being sent, it not only applies to sending out people, it also applies to sending out churches and Christian organizations.¹³ And until the Lord decides otherwise, He's placed our church on this corner of Bemidji for His gospel purposes. Being a loving, welcoming church means that we make room for new people, for all different kinds of people, not just people who are exactly like us. The gospel is "A Gospel for All Peoples," which means that we share this place with people from different ethnicities, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different political affiliations, and so on. We strive to provide a welcoming atmosphere that makes new people feel wanted and included, rather than feeling like outsiders. When people from our community visit E-Free Bemidji, we want them to know that we genuinely care about them, and that they matter to us. We want them to feel like they belong here, like this could be their church home. Welcoming new people requires constant diligence, because our tendency is to circle up with our "besties." Back in youth group we used to have a horseshoe rule, no circling up. Always leave an opening in your circle, your horseshoe, for others to walk up and join in. So it's important that we invite new people to sit by us, and that we introduce them to our friends. And when we see someone standing or sitting by themselves, we go over and talk to them. You just never know who might walk into our church building needing some help and support, and seeking answers about who this Jesus really is.

Part of providing a loving church, is making sure that those of us within this church, cherish the church. Unfortunately, sometimes rather than cherishing the church, believers find great satisfaction in criticizing the church, and the people in the church. Now to be clear, every church has made its share of mistakes because every church is

¹² By the way, our prayer can also be combined with fasting, as we plead with God to rescue the spiritually lost people whom we care so much about. This is exactly the kind of revival that we need, not only in our nation, but also in our own church and local community. May God begin revival right here, with us, in northern Minnesota.

¹³ Consider Revelation 1:20 which refers to the 7 churches as lampstands, lampstands which hold forth the light.

run by imperfect people. And any churches that have taken part in abuse or other serious scandals, need to be held fully accountable, to the full extent of Matthew 18, as well as to the full extent of the criminal laws of our land.^{14 15}

What we're talking about this morning though, is the unfortunate reality that some believers seem to enjoy taking potshots, even at the churches who are staying true to Christ. They seem to delight in throwing stones, in pointing out the flaws, and in all kinds of slander, which hurts and divides the church. But Ephesians 5:25-27 reminds us, "...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, [a beautiful bride] without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." When we attack good churches, and belittle them and complain about them to anyone and everyone who will listen, we're picking on Jesus' bride, and we're damaging her reputation.^{16 17} Can you see how this might not be very attractive to unbelievers? When we invite people to follow Jesus with us, we also invite them to become part of our church family.¹⁸

In the context of Romans 10:14, who would ever want to "call on the name of the Lord," and become part of a church family, that spends so much of its time criticizing one another, rather than cherishing one another? These kinds of unfortunate realities make our faith incredibly unattractive to the watching world.¹⁹ To be clear, if we've been hurt by the church, or disappointed by the church, then we need to address it. But let's be careful how we address it, and to whom; otherwise, we may end up causing the unintended consequence of driving unbelievers away from Christ. In Romans 11, Paul says he was motivated to share the good news with the Gentiles in order to make the Jews jealous. So let's make sure that we continue to be a loving, welcoming church that makes people jealous. So that when anyone in Bemidji looks over here at E-Free, they say, "Yes, I totally want what they have!"²⁰

Another way to improve our evangelistic effectiveness is to...

III. Proclaim the good news with our words and actions. Once we've prayed fervently, and provided a loving, welcoming church, we then need to proclaim the good

¹⁴ None of this is to suggest that any church is perfect, or that we should avoid confronting sin and hypocrisy within the church. We absolutely do need to hold each other accountable as fellow representatives of Jesus Christ. But there are more appropriate ways to address our concerns; ways that are more helpful, biblical, and fruitful than the public bashing of Jesus' bride. Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1-2; and James 5:19-20 all come to mind.

¹⁵ That's not to say we NEVER confront in public. For example, see 1 Timothy 5:19-21 and Galatians 2:11-13.

¹⁶ "A growing number of Christians today simply do not like the church. They are down on it. They have grown cynical. They declare, with boldness, their love for Jesus, but they are not so sure they like his bride, the church." Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 42.

¹⁷ "Increasingly, members of Christ's own body slander, criticize, and malign his bride, the church. I hear the whispers, the backhanded comment, and witness firsthand some rotten fruit flying and hitting Jesus' bride. Some people even consider it hip to beat up on the church. Sadly, some of the harshest criticism, the most enthusiastic mudslinging, comes from those who claim to love Jesus, and his people. ...much of our in-house mudslinging and incessant criticism has become almost recreational, and it breaks the heart of Jesus. ...When we bash the church, we bash God's people. When we throw rotten fruit at the church, we are throwing it at our own brothers and sisters in Christ." Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 43, 45, and 46.

¹⁸ The fact is, some people hesitate to become Christians because they know it may cost them heavy relational casualties. If they start following Jesus, they're going to need a new community, maybe even a new family, because their previous community may not approve of the changes that come with their new life in Christ.

¹⁹ "If we don't love the church, why would our unbelieving friends love the Lord of the church?" Kevin G. Harney, *Organic Outreach for Churches*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 41.

²⁰ The Newsboys' song, "Shine," comes to mind. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qivCl1M9Rh0>

news! Matthew 5:16 says, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” One of the ways that we proclaim the gospel is through our actions, through good deeds done in Jesus’ name. And many of us do a very good job of shining our light before others this way. We do these good deeds in Jesus’ name, for the glory of God, and this compels people to take a closer look into the good news about Jesus. People need to see gospel fruit lived out in our lives: In the way we serve in our community, in the way we conduct ourselves in our business dealings, in our school activities, and in any of our other interactions in the community. But here’s the thing, people also need us to speak up! We need to proclaim the gospel with our words, not just in our actions. Romans 10:14 asks, “...And how can they HEAR without someone preaching to them?” Brother or Sister in Christ, that “someone” is YOU! We need to go further than simply living out the gospel with our actions, we need to proclaim it! Good news is meant to be announced, vocalized out loud. We shouldn’t expect people to simply “catch the hint” of the gospel, or pick it up through some kind of osmosis.²¹ People can’t hear the good news without someone preaching to them, without someone proclaiming it.²² One of the best ways of proclaiming the good news with our words is by sharing our own personal testimony of faith.²³

> Monday night, October 23, at the women’s overflow event, Kim Kaml is going to share her gospel testimony.

> In your bulletin, you’ll notice an invitation to share your gospel testimony at one of our morning church services on November 19.

But above and beyond these kinds of opportunities, why not share your testimony with a spiritually lost friend this week? The WORST thing that could happen? Maybe you’ll fumble through it a bit. The BEST thing that could happen? You could share the good news with someone who *really* needs to hear it! Now, at this point, some of you may be thinking, “Ok Pastor Jerry, I think I’ll let someone else have beautiful feet!” Or maybe you’re thinking to yourself, “I can’t add anything else to my plate right now!” Here’s the thing though, this isn’t necessarily adding anything more to your plate, it’s making the most of the opportunities already on your plate. It’s sharing with someone you already know, someone you already plan to spend time with this week. Now, if you don’t have any unbelieving friends in your life, then that’s a different situation. It’s worth asking yourself a question: why not? Why are you spending ALL of your time with other believers? If all of our time is spent with people who are already Christians, then we’ll never have opportunities to share the good news with those who need to hear it.²⁴ *We need to prioritize our proximity next to those who need to hear the gospel.* I began today’s sermon by asking a question: “How are your feet looking these days?” ***May the feet of those of us here at E-Free Bemidji become more and more beautiful, as we proclaim the good news to our family, our friends, and our neighbors!***

²¹ Oxford languages defines osmosis as “the process of gradual or unconscious assimilation of ideas and knowledge.”
https://www.google.com/search?q=osmosis+definition&sca_esv=

²² Romans 10:8 says the gospel is “the message concerning faith that we PROCLAIM.”

²³ YOU are the best person to share your own story, of how you came to faith in Jesus Christ, and how that faith has made a difference in your life.

²⁴ An important caveat here is that we need to be influencing them, not the other way around. Consider 1 Corinthians 15:33.