

# Sermon: Good News is for Sharing

Romans 1:14-16

Timothy K. Beougher

**Timothy K. Beougher** is Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1996. Dr. Beougher co-edited *Accounts of Campus Revival* and *Evangelism for a Changing World*, and is the author of several scholarly articles. He is currently at work on a biography of Richard Baxter.

## Introduction

Imagine that you are working in a medical lab one day and you make a startling discovery.<sup>1</sup> You find a disease that has infected 100% of the human race. And what is worse, as you continue your research, you discover that the disease is 100% fatal! You feverishly work to find a cure and, one day, you do! You apply the antidote to yourself and it works beautifully. You are healed!

So here is the situation. You know of a disease that affects 100% of the people in the world. You know it is 100% fatal. You have discovered the cure, and you know it works. The question then arises, “Now what do you do? As one who possesses life-saving information, what is your responsibility?”

Let me shift scenes for a moment. In 2 Kings 7 a Syrian attack is underway on Samaria. The Syrian army had surrounded the walls, and was keeping provisions from entering the city. The people of Samaria had no food and were starving.

But unknown to the people in the city, God had caused the Syrian army to flee in the night. Four men from the city went out on a mission to try and find some food. To their amazement, they found the Syrian camp completely deserted! They ate and drank their fill.

In 2 Kings 7:9 we see their response: “Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent!’” They understood the concept that “Good News is for Shar-

ing.” To be in possession of good news, of life-saving news, obligates us to share it with others!

Let’s go back to the first scenario and put a steeple on top of that medical laboratory. You know of a disease that affects 100% of the people in the world. You know it is 100% fatal. You have discovered the cure, and you know it works. What is your responsibility?

Good news is for sharing! When we reflect deeply about the gospel, the good news, we realize we cannot remain silent. We must speak about what we have seen and heard.

In Romans 1 the Apostle Paul begins with a brief personal introduction and then reflects on the gospel, the good news. In Romans 1:14-16, he points us to 3 key attitudes that formed the basis for his evangelistic zeal. When we understand them, they will form the basis for our evangelistic zeal as well:

I am under obligation both to Greek and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (NASB)

## Possession Leads to Obligation

The first principle we note in this passage is that possessing good news obligates us to share it. Look with me at verse 14. Paul refers to being “under obligation.” It is a strong word, often trans-

lated “debtor.” Paul is saying that those of us who have the message of the gospel are debtors. Therefore, we should feel a profound sense of obligation to share Christ with others.

Unfortunately, we have become experts at rationalizing away our obligation. We say things like, “It’s not my gift.” Or, “I’m not very good with people.” As He gave the Great Commission, Jesus did not say “Go into all the world, all you *extroverts*.” Evangelism may be a gift, but it is also a command. God says, “Don’t rationalize, evangelize!”

Notice to whom Paul says he is under obligation: “both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.” The Greeks proudly looked at their language and culture as the pinnacle of civilization. Therefore everyone else was viewed as “barbarians.” They prized learning and separated persons into categories such as “the wise and the foolish.” Taken together these terms encompass all humankind. Paul is using the categories of his day to emphasize that because of the salvation he had received and his calling by the Lord Jesus, he was a debtor to *all* people.

Like the ancient Greeks, we also have a tendency to categorize, to separate people into different groups based on our own criteria. We may feel that some “groups” are more worthy or more deserving than some other “groups.” God says, “Don’t categorize, evangelize!” Good news is for sharing! Possessing good news obligates us to share it.

W. H. Griffith Thomas has said, “This sense of obligation lies at the root of all genuine service. The man who in heart and conscience realizes that ‘I am a debtor,’ is the one who will do the most and best work for Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-1980s a team of Christians from Romania shared their testimony at an evening church service in Fort Worth, Texas. While Romania has seen some dramatic changes in recent years, at that time the Communist regime was firmly in control and the church was enduring persecution.

A young university student shared her testimony. She was very bright, and had a promising future before her as an engineer. Six months before she was to graduate, all students at her university were ordered to sign a statement affirming their commitment to atheism and pledging their support to the Communist party. One of this young lady’s professors knew she was a Christian. He went to her and admonished her, “Simply sign the form. You don’t have to change your beliefs! After you graduate and get your job, you can do what you want. But if you don’t sign the form, you won’t graduate and you’ll probably end up sweeping floors for a living!”

The girl responded, “If I deny my Savior for 6 months, what is to keep me from denying Him the rest of my life? I don’t have to be an engineer. I do have to be a witness.”

Have you come to grips with *your* obligation to share the gospel with others? That young lady understood the phrase, “I am under obligation.” To have good news obligates us to share it. To have the medicine of life obligates us to share it with the sick and dying.

I have a friend who teaches a training seminar in churches called “The Layman and the Great Commission.” For a “final exam” in the class, the first question is as follows: “In fifty words or less, tell me whose responsibility the Great Commission is.” Do you know the answer he is

looking for? It is not *fifty* words, but *one* word. “Mine”

The key is our perspective. If a woman assists doctors at a hospital in the United States, what do we call her? A nurse. But if she gets on an airplane and goes to the Philippines, what do we call her then? A medical missionary. Why do we not view her as a medical missionary here?

I once overheard a woman responding to the question, “What do you do?” I loved her answer. She responded, “I am a disciple of Jesus Christ, on mission for Him, cleverly disguised as an emergency room nurse.” That woman has the picture! She has God’s perspective! To have good news obligates us to share it! To have the medicine of life obligates us to share it with the sick and dying! Our most important “title” is that of “witness.”

John Vassar, a passionate soul-winner in Boston, was once waiting for someone in a hotel lobby. While he was waiting, he spoke to a lady in the lobby about Christ. When the lady’s husband arrived, she said to him, “There has been an old man here talking with me about religion.” The husband reacted strongly. “If I had been here,” he said, “I would have told him very quickly to go about his business.” She answered, “If you had seen him you would have thought he was about his business.”<sup>3</sup>

Possessing good news obligates us to share it. Have you accepted your responsibility to be a witness for Jesus Christ?

### **Understanding Leads to Eagerness**

But the passage goes on—not only do we see that possessing good news obligates us to share it, we see secondly that understanding just how good the good news is causes us to share it eagerly. Look at verse 15, “Thus, for my part, I am eager

to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

Paul makes it clear that he intends to fulfill his obligation. Regardless of what others may or may not do, he is going to do his part. But notice that Paul does not consider his obligation a heavy burden he must bear. Paul did not need to be coerced or have his arm twisted to get him to share his faith. He was not only *willing*, he was *eager*! I am convinced that all you had to do to get the Apostle Paul to share Christ with you was to take your hand off his mouth! Understanding just how good the good news is causes us to share it eagerly.

My oldest child, Kristi, turns sixteen this year. It seems like only yesterday that Sharon and I were on our way to the maternity ward in Fort Worth, Texas. Following over twenty hours of labor, we experienced the miracle of birth. As I held Kristi in my arms, I wanted to shout the good news of her birth to the whole world.

The hospital was a modern, up-to-date facility, with a telephone right in the delivery room. I picked up the phone and called Sharon’s parents, my parents, Sharon’s sisters, my sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, CNN, *Time*, *Newsweek*—anyone who would listen! I had good news that I wanted to share!

After several minutes of calling, I went downstairs to the cafeteria to get something to eat. It had been a long, hard labor and I was tired and exhausted! As I was riding the elevator down to the ground floor, I told the woman riding with me about Kristi’s birth. As I went through the cafeteria line, I told the woman making the salads that if she had a break coming up that she might want to go upstairs and see the beautiful new baby girl in the nursery!

As I paid for my meal, the lady at the

cash register fumbled with my change—just for a moment—but it was all the time I needed. I seized the opportunity to tell her about Kristi's birth. As I went over to get some napkins, a man paused to put ketchup on his hamburger. He likewise heard the good news of Kristi's birth. When I rode the elevator back upstairs, there was a man and his son riding with me—two for one! They both heard the joyful news about my new daughter.

As I was leaving the parking garage that night and paying the parking attendant, the horrible thought occurred to me, "Perhaps news has not yet filtered out to this man! Perhaps he is still in the dark! He may not know the good news!" So as I paid for my parking, I shared with him the joyous news of Kristi's birth.

The next morning as I was spending time with the Lord, it was as if He said to me, "Tim, that's something of the eagerness I'd like to see you have in sharing *me* with others. You were eager to share with others what was good news to *you*—but how eager are you to share what is the best news *they* could ever hear?"

How eager are you to share the gospel with others? Are you not simply *willing*, but *eager* to share His love with others? If you cannot honestly answer yes, how can you get this eagerness? One key is to spend time alone with God each day. In Matthew 12:34, Jesus tells us that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." When you are in love with someone, you cannot wait to tell others about that person!

I was still in high school when my older sister Bev came home from college over Thanksgiving break. I had all sorts of questions to ask her about college life. Was dormitory food as bad as they say it is? Were the classes as hard as people claim?

Bev was not interested in answering any of my questions, because she had met a young man named Mark. All she wanted to talk about for four days was Mark: "Mark this, Mark that, isn't Mark wonderful?" I couldn't get a word in edgewise!

Why did my sister want to talk about her boyfriend? Because what Jesus said in Matthew 12:34 is true—our mouth does speak out of that which fills our heart. My sister's heart was filled with thoughts about Mark, and that was reflected in her speech.

In Mark 1:43-45 we see Jesus healing a man with leprosy. The text says, "Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 'See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.' Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news."

Jesus ordered him not to tell anyone until he had been declared "clean" by a priest, but this man simply couldn't help it! When your heart is bubbling over with good news, you cannot help but speak of what you have seen and heard!

### **Realization Leads to Boldness**

Not only do we see that possessing good news obligates us to share it, and that understanding just how good the good news is causes us to share it eagerly, we see finally that realizing the power of the good news motivates us to share it boldly. Let's look at verse 16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

As we come to verse sixteen, we are immediately struck by Paul's use of the negative here: "not ashamed." Why does

Paul change from the positive to the negative? Why did he not simply say, “I glory in the gospel,” or “I am proud of the gospel?”

Remember to whom Paul was writing—to citizens of Rome, the self-proclaimed intellectual capital of the world. In 1 Corinthians 1:23 he has already reminded us that to the wise of this world the gospel is foolishness. Paul had encountered opposition and ridicule to his message before. But would he be deterred by such responses? No!

Why? Because he realized the gospel was the power of God for salvation. That is why Paul was so eager to share the gospel. That is why he was not ashamed of its simple message even among self-proclaimed intellectuals. He believed in its *power* to change lives.

Do we really believe the gospel is the power of God unto salvation? I fear that too often we settle for a religion of the “possible.” If someone doesn’t respond the first time we share the gospel, or if we presume ahead of time that they won’t be interested, we give up on that person—we “write them off.”

One of the great benefits of studying church history is to see how God is in the business of saving people that you and I might have “written off.” I think of the Apostle Paul. He wasn’t always known as the Apostle Paul by the early church, was he? No, in fact, the early church knew him as Saul, zealous persecutor of Christians. Who would ever have imagined that this man, so filled with hatred towards Christianity, would one day become the greatest Christian who ever lived, a great evangelist, church planter, missionary, and theologian? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation!

I think of John Newton, by his own

admission the most wicked man of his generation. A slave trader, a drunkard—who would imagine that this man would ever become a pastor and a hymn writer? But God gloriously saved John Newton and he wrote the precious words to “Amazing Grace”:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind, but now I see.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation!

I think of Chuck Colson, the so-called “hatchet man” of the Nixon administration. He had made it to the top. He was one of the most powerful men in the entire world. He had everything—what did he need with God? But as you know if you have read the book or seen the movie *Born Again*, the Watergate scandal brought Chuck Colson to his knees in repentance and faith before Jesus Christ. Today he has a powerful ministry among intellectuals and among those in prison. Who would have imagined that “hatchet man” Chuck Colson would become evangelist Chuck Colson? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation!

I think of William Murray, son of Madalyn Murray O’Hair, for years the most well-known atheist in America. When William Murray was a boy, his mother filed a lawsuit where he was the plaintiff. The decision in that 1963 Supreme Court case banned mandatory prayer from the public schools. Who would imagine that the son of the country’s most prominent atheist would one day become a Christian? William Murray was converted in 1980, and now heads the William Murray Evangelistic Association, a ministry that counsels

people seeking spiritual answers. The gospel is the power of God!

Why do we find it hard to accept that the gospel has the power to change the life of everyone who hears it, even those who so openly defy it with their words and by their actions? Nowhere in the Bible does it say, “go into all the world and share the gospel with everyone who looks like they are a *good candidate* to become a Christian.” We are to share with all! We are to take the good news to every creature!

What about in your life? Do you have a “Saul” you have given up on? Someone who is religious but lost? Someone who has a “zeal, but not according to knowledge?” The gospel is the power of God! Do you have a “John Newton” that you have grown discouraged about? Someone who is so far away from God that you see no hope of them ever becoming a Christian? The gospel is the power of God! Are you friends with a “Chuck Colson,” someone who has reached the pinnacle of worldly success and seemingly has no need for God? Or perhaps even a “William Murray” who openly proclaims his atheism? The gospel is the power of God!

My undergraduate studies were in engineering at Kansas State University. We were privileged to have on our faculty Dr. Dudley Williams, one of the top nuclear physicists in the country. Dr. Williams was one of only a handful of scientists chosen to participate in the first atomic test made by the U. S. Government in the desert sands of New Mexico. One day in class he “chased a rabbit” (as all good professors are known to do from time to time) and shared the story of that first atomic test. He told how the scientists had carefully calculated the power of the blast and had designed special gauges to be able to record its magnitude.

Huddled in a command shack a great distance from the explosion, Dr. Williams told what happened when the bomb was detonated. He noted that all the needles were immediately “pegged” at their highest reading, where they hovered before falling back. He laughed as he said to the class, “Do you realize that the top engineering minds in the country had *totally underestimated* the power of the atom?”

As I have reflected on that incident, I have concluded that underestimation is precisely what we do as Christians. We underestimate the power of the gospel, and that causes us to be hesitant, perhaps even ashamed of sharing it with others. We construct a “gospel gauge,” reflecting how powerful we think the gospel is, and then we place that alongside a person. If it appears like the gospel will be powerful enough to touch that person, we share the good news with them. If we are not convinced about the true power of the gospel, we don’t share.

Richard Sisson has a penetrating analysis of how some of us at times approach sharing the gospel with lost people:

Oh, pardon me, I know you are a very well adjusted person whose life is wonderfully integrated and satisfying, but I wonder if you would do me a favor and listen to me for five minutes as I share with you some remote facts that you probably don’t need or desire to hear about, but I sure would appreciate it if you would do me a favor and listen, and if you do I promise I will go away and stop bothering you, and never trouble you again!<sup>4</sup>

Do you ever share the good news in an insipid manner like that? The gospel is the power of God! Paul knew what he was talking about! He had experienced it!

Have you settled in your mind that the gospel is the power of God? Will you

allow God to smash your “gospel gauge” that you have constructed, which limits what you believe God can do in people’s lives? In John 4:35, Jesus said, “Do you not say, ‘Four months more and the harvest will be here?’ Look, I tell you; raise your eyes and look at the fields, how they are white for harvest.” Do you believe these words that many people, more people than you dare to hope—people like Saul, John Newton, Chuck Colson, and William Murray—are waiting to hear the Gospel of Christ and receive Him into their lives? Jesus wouldn’t have said it if it weren’t true, but many of us act like we don’t believe it. Spurgeon observed, “those who never exhort sinners are seldom winners of souls to any great extent . . .”<sup>5</sup> We must declare the gospel and then invite people to Christ.

### Conclusion

I leave as a challenge to your life and mine these words of Samuel Shoemaker, the great evangelist of a past generation. Billy Graham said of Shoemaker, “He has touched more lives than any other man I have ever known.” This is an edited portion of an essay he wrote, entitled “I Stand by the Door”:

I stand by the door. I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.  
The door is the most important door in the world—  
It is the door through which men walk when they find God . . .

Many creep along the wall like blind men,  
With outstretched, groping hands.  
Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,  
Yet they never find it . . . So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world  
Is for men to find that door—the

door to God.

Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die  
On cold nights, in cruel cities, in the dead of winter . . .  
They live on the other side of it—live because they have not found it.

Nothing else matters compared to helping them find it,  
And open it, and walk in, and find Him . . .  
So I stand by the door . . .

I admire the people who go way in.  
But I wish they would not forget how it was  
Before they got in. Then they would be able to help  
The people who have not yet even found the door. . .

You can go in too deeply and stay in too long,  
And forget the people outside the door.  
As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,  
Near enough to God to hear Him, and know He is there,  
But not so far from men as not to hear them,  
And remember they are there, too.

Where? Outside the door—Thousands of them, millions of them.  
But—more important for me—One of them, two of them, ten of them,  
Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.  
So I shall stand by the door and wait  
For those who seek it.  
‘I had rather be a door-keeper . . .’  
So I stand by the door.<sup>6</sup>

What about you? Will you choose to be a doorkeeper? Possessing good news obligates us to share it. Understanding just how good the good news is causes us to share it eagerly. Realizing the power of the good news motivates us to share it boldly.

Remember our four friends in Samaria? “Then they said to one another, ‘We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent!’” Today

is a day of good news! Are you keeping silent or are you sharing? Good news is for sharing!

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This illustration is adapted from Mark McCloskey, *Tell it Often—Tell it Well* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1986) 11-13.

<sup>2</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 57.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas E. Vassar, *Uncle John Vassar, or The Flight of Faith* (New York: American Tract Society, 1879) 171.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Sisson, *Training for Evangelism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979) 38.

<sup>5</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) 343.

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Moor Shoemaker, "I Stand by the Door: An Apologia for My Life," in Helen Smith Shoemaker, *I Stand by the Door: The Life of Sam Shoemaker* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1967) ix-x.