

Ad-Mission Kick-off
Why Participate? Pt.1
Matthew 19:16-30

Introduction:

Let's begin with a little insight check: Who can tell me what the significance of today is for 60% of Southeastern Wisconsin's households?

The answer is that for 60% of Southeastern Wisconsin's households today marks the beginning of the NFL playoffs. Where do the playoffs end? The playoffs end with Super Bowl Sunday on February 5. The startling statistic is this: 60% of the households that make up the Milwaukee TV market tune in to watch the Super Bowl. That is among the highest ratios across the country for a single market share.

What is the significance of that statistic to us as a church?

A few months ago, I was invited to listen to the vision of a man named Joel Haaz. Joel has established a ministry called Ad-mission (slide). Ad-mission is a para-church ministry that seeks to make a connection with our culture and the church of Christ through the use of mass media. As I went to the visionary lunch, I was introduced to another man, John Lincoln, of the Boelter-Lincoln advertising firm in Milwaukee. Boelter-Lincoln is one of Milwaukee's largest ad agencies responsible for such things as Wisconsin Tourism, Wisconsin Dells and other high-end ad campaigns. Together these men were desirous of producing an advertising campaign centered on the Super Bowl that could be used by the Holy Spirit in sparking a crucial question into the hearts and minds of thousands of postmodern individuals. John Lincoln donated the commercials ready-for-air and Joel provided the man power to make it a reality.

Now, I know I have some terms to define for you and I will in a moment. But first, here is the vision:

Ad-Mission has raised enough money to purchase 4 television ads to air during the Super Bowl. Actually, 2 ads will run during the game and the other two will air before and after the game (I hope to have the disk with the ads on them in a few days so that I can show them to you). These ads will be run during the local time slots and on all the local cable networks.

The ads have a central theme asking the question: "What if it true?" They are aimed at the age group of 18-30 who have all but abandoned the thought of organized religion and who are now the second and third generation of non-church goers. In other words, they have no concept of Christian worldview. They have no concept of the Bible. They have no idea it is comprised of two testaments. They have never heard of David and Moses and Paul and Peter. If they have heard of Moses, they simply identify him as Charlton Heston.

There are largely three broad categories of lost people. (1) There are the lost within the church; (2) The lost who will attend church. They are considered pre-churched. They go occasionally or for their children; but they hold the categories for Christianity in their minds. (3) Then there are the lost who want nothing to do with church. We are going after this third group. There are people out there who have no concept of God's existence, of the Bible or anything Christian. As early as 50 years ago, if we were to evangelize an atheist, we at least knew that he/she was a "Christian atheist." That is, we knew that the God they were rejecting was the Christian God. That is not the case anymore.

Show "Man on the Street" video

Read the ads:

Strategy: In the weeks that follow the Super Bowl, the ads will air for a week at a time and one at a time. The area will be bombarded with this question, “What if it’s true?” In addition to the television ads there will also be billboards, sides of buses, trashcan wraps, bulletin boards, etc. It will be a full advertising blitz with the simple question, “What if it’s true?”

Conservative evangelical churches that agree with the Ad-Mission statement of faith have purchased banners and a website that are behind the campaign. Thus, as an individual views the ads, he/she will be directed to a website www.tickettohope.com where they will be given the gospel in an online tract form and then directed to a church in their area. The different local churches who have signed on to the campaign will have their websites linked to this central website. In addition, each church will have a “What if it’s true?” banner flying outside their facility. Churches can purchase door-hangers with the “What if it’s true?” question on it so as to blitz their local area. Our church and First Baptist of Merton are the only churches in our area who are participating in the campaign. Northbrook church is participating to our north. There is plenty of ground to cover.

As the individual ads run for a week at a time, the greater Milwaukee area will be asked, What if the Bible’s claim to truth is true. They will be invited to attend a church of their choice to hear the answer. The Sunday following the ad blitz with the Bible theme, the churches will preach a sermon dealing with the veracity of Scripture. The other three ads and themes will be treated in the same way in subsequent weeks ending with Good Friday and Easter.

Now, this excites me for a couple of reasons.

1. This campaign is a display of unity and evangelistic push coming from evangelical churches that have a tendency to shy away from the use of such means. It smacks of easy-believism, church growth, seeker-sensitive tactics. I will address this concern in a moment.
2. The campaign is centered on the local church. In no way shape or form are we going to be told what to say or how to say it. We can tailor the evangelism to our theology and our convictions.
3. No one in the Ad-Mission organization views the advertisements themselves as evangelism. Running the 30 second ad that simply asks someone to consider Jesus or the Bible or God, is not evangelism. Without a clear explanation of the full-orbed Gospel, there is no evangelism. The website and encouragement to follow through at a church is paramount to the complete process.

Let me address a couple of concerns and questions:

Pastor, does this make us seeker-sensitive?

The church-growth movement, as a movement, is a philosophy of ministry that flows from a certain theological grid. The seeker-driven churches believe that they must make church appealing to the un-churched. People are bored with church and religion. They don’t want to be offended, embarrassed or judged. So let’s make church less offensive and seeker friendly. Let’s take down the cross, give them entertaining music, and do away with the pulpit and preaching for drama and videos. In fact, give them the option to sit in a café and watch the service while enjoying coffee and donuts. Don’t preach doctrine because doctrine divides and is offensive. Make church relevant.

The thing that concerns me is that I think the church-growth movement has hijacked the word “relevant” and changed its meaning from “applying to the matter at hand” to mean “palatable.” They believe that doctrine is irrelevant because it is not palatable. I could hobby-horse this for days. But you know what we believe. So to the question, “Will this make us seeker-driven?” My answer is, No!

There is nothing about this campaign that says we are changing our philosophy of ministry. We will not adjust our worship service to make it palatable to the lost, but we will invite them in for four

Sundays in order to target the questions they are asking. The lost are always welcome in the church, but the church's worship is not for the lost. While we will not tailor our worship for the lost; and while we will not convert our Sunday morning service into an evangelistic service; we will engage in corporate evangelism for a season.

Instead of this making us seeker-driven by philosophy, I think it makes us wise stewards of the gospel. Paul says in Colossians 4:

Colossians 4:2-6 (ESV)

² **Continue steadfastly in prayer**, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—

⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵ **Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders**, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

What does the Christian's attitude toward evangelism involve?

Paul describes two facets necessary for each believer's attitude toward evangelism. He states them in the form of commands: "Continue steadfastly in prayer" and "Conduct yourselves with wisdom." Let's describe them this way: When it comes to evangelism, every believer must be involved with...

1. The ministry of prayer.

There are several things I could say about the ministry of prayer that comes from this text. I could draw your attention to the fact that you are commanded by Paul to pray for the formal ministry of evangelism and missions *that others* are embarking on. Notice that Paul is commanding the Colossians to pray for his ministry. That could be one point of application. A second one could be that you should learn from Paul's example and *seek the prayers of others* when as you embark upon your own ministries of evangelism. Paul makes it very clear that the prayers of the Colossians will be effective in making his ministry run. So he says, "Pray that God will open a door for the word." The prayer of others opens doors for your evangelism. Therefore, seek the prayer of others.

Church, we must pray for this gospel endeavor. Pray earnestly for souls to be rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. Pray for a door to be opened.

Above all, Paul seems to want you to see the manner in which you should pray. Attached to the command "continue steadfastly in prayer" are many modifiers describing the manner in which your prayers should be offered.

a. *Be fervent in prayer.* This is a statement that calls for not just a casual prayer meeting but a gritty determination to pray. It involves a commitment to go the distance. This word is used frequently in the NT attached to prayer.

(1) Acts 1:14

(2) Acts 2:42

(3) The concept may be best demonstrated in Luke 18:1-8

- b. *Be persistent in prayer.* This aspect of prayer demonstrates a future perspective – being prospective in prayer. Christians who live by faith are future oriented. They are a people who trust God to keep his promises. We are a people of hope, a people of assurance. The hope that came to us in the Gospel message is the very hope we are calling forth to fall on the ears of those whom we carry the message.
- c. *Be grateful in prayer.* Everything that happens in the ministry of evangelism is owing to the grace of God. If God’s grace is not at work, salvation is not possible! Being thankful in prayer places the glory where the glory belongs. “Lord, we praise you for all the open doors you have granted so far and we know that every door that does indeed open up is opened by your mercy. Thus, we praise you for your work in drawing men and women to yourself through our preaching of the gospel.”

But, perhaps there is one more aspect to this attitude of gratitude in prayer that connects with the previous two aspects (fervency and persistence): as we are fervent and persistent in prayer, we must not murmur and feel offended if God does not work according to our wishes. Gratitude is the check and balance. Everything that happens is God’s will and I am grateful. Therefore, prayer with thanksgiving is both a statement (“Thank you Father for working!”) and a request (“Help me to trust your working so as to not lose heart!”).

Cf. 2 Cor. 2:14

So Paul says, “I command you to commit yourselves to persistent, fervent and grateful prayer in praying for our ministry in order that God may do three things:” (1) open up doors for the word; (2) grant me courage to speak as it is necessary to speak; (3) to speak with clarity when I speak.

So notice that the means God uses for opening pathways for missions and evangelism is through a praying church.

1. Pray that God would use these advertisements to open a door for the Gospel.
2. Pray for me to have courage to preach the four sermons with boldness and courage.
3. Pray for me to speak with clarity.

We honor the sovereignty of God by calling upon him who alone can open pathways in the hardened hearts of Milwaukee’s postmodern people.

“Lord, if you do not open up the doors, people will not be reached. We come to you acknowledging your final sovereign power over every human heart. Open the eyes of hearts and open pathways!”

2. **The ministry of proclamation.**

Paul’s second command is to “conduct yourselves with wisdom toward those outside.” With this use of the word “outsider” Paul is referring to those outside the church, those outside the faith – those who are unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 5.12-13). So here, Paul primarily has the evangelism ministry of his readers in view. “As you live your life in this world, living and working and conducting business, do so in such a way that you are wise.” Since we authenticate God’s salvation by our words and lives, we can either impugn or enhance God’s reputation. After all, how many people refuse to become believers because of the hypocrites in the church?

This walk of wisdom manifests itself in two ways:

- b. Wisdom buys up every opportunity for evangelism. The phrase, “make the best use of the time,” or make the most of every opportunity” is literally, “purchase every opportunity.”

Like a greedy landowner who buys up every available parcel of land for himself, so we are to buy up every opportunity for speaking the gospel into the lives of others so as to claim as much enemy territory as possible.

I believe that we would be foolish to not participate in such a campaign. The campaign is a good idea with right-headed hopes and endeavors. May we buy up the opportunity and pray that the doors are opened.

- c. Wisdom speaks grace into every opportunity.
- d. Wisdom speaks with flare. The opposite of salty is bland and plain. Don't be wooden. Don't be boring. Speak with some interest. In fact, people who are walking in wisdom and praying for the Spirit to give them courage and clarity will be so involved in conversations that they can begin with any point and launch grace into that conversation.
 - (1) Woman at the well
 - (2) Rich young ruler
 - (3) Pharisees
 - (4) Crowd of 5,000 people
 - (5) Pagans on Mars Hill

Conclusion:

From time to time in the life of the church there needs to be a wake up call to some simple and central and basic things. One of those truths is: Christianity is an evangelistic religion.

Our participation in corporate evangelism may make it easier and more enjoyable for us to participate in personal evangelism.

It is persuasive and expansive and missionary. It is not coercive. It does not use the sword, manipulation or brainwashing. But it does proclaim, and persuade and plead and pray. And where this is not believed and practiced Christianity ceases to be Christianity and starts to become another religion with another king. When we lose a passion to see people won over to Jesus, we lose Jesus. He came to seek and save the lost!

There is an easy connection between our evangelism and the Lord's Supper.

Are you glad that Jesus came to seek and save the lost?

Are you glad he used an evangelist – a truth teller in your life?

1 Corinthians 11:26 (ESV)

²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

As we eat the bread and drink the cup may we praise our soul-seeking, heart-changing Savior and then ask that our own salvation would ignite within us a passion to pray and proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.