

EVANGELISM AS GOD'S MISSION THROUGH US

God chose to include us in His ministry of evangelism. He operated on the basis of the multiplication of influence. He began His ministry through a family, a priesthood, a nation, and a king. He began another approach by recruiting and deploying the Old Testament prophets. Their ministry became a potent method of spiritual change. The fact prophets were not accepted does not diminish their influence. Their strident voices and harsh denouncements awoke nations, leaders and individuals. Although the messengers were sometimes killed, their message became a standard for morality. God's will was pronounced in clear and compelling ways.

For example, Amos, called by God from the orchards and pastures of Israel, altered the thinking of Israel. The people of this nation knew their favored position as God's chosen. They came to count on His favor as continuous and without regard to their behavior. Amos agreed God trusted them with divine information and they had faithfully followed the liturgies, but when they sinned they became as other nations in God's sight.

Amos scolded Israel for twin evils; oppression of the poor by the wealthy and the corruption of the judicial system. To find God's favor again required righteousness. Amos' message of doom does not continue unendingly. He offers hope as God promises to restore.

God used other means than people to communicate. His judgment served as a loud and painful means of correction. Sometimes He used other nations. One time a large fish swallowed a future spokesman. Disasters appeared to serve His purpose of punishment. His purposes invariably are to draw people to Himself. God teaches and

attracts people. Even today when tragedies and difficulties arise the human tendency is to ask “Why?” What is the message for me? What is God saying?

John the Baptist unites the Old Testament and New Testament era. He acts as a bridge from the Old Testament predictions of a messiah by announcing the Savior. His sermons were similar to Amos in their harsh tones of condemnation. He viewed the religious leaders as hypocrites and serpents. He called people to repent. He used water baptism as initiation into discipleship. His message of repentance included an introduction of the long anticipated Christ. He refused to become the focus of his popularity. He redirected attention to the One who would follow him. He recognized his decreasing role in preference to the Christ.

John the Gospel writer places high praise on John’s ministry, “There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:6-9).

Light, or spiritual insight, illuminated every person. Spiritual awareness is a gift of God’s love. God used John the Baptist as a bearer of Good News telling us Light was on the way. His role is still the work of the witness. We are to shed light and point to Christ, the Light of the world.

Christians frequently say, “But I cannot witness.” Our reasoning is usually from a fear base. We feel frightened by the possibility of failure, alienating people, or chasing away the sincere seeker. These concerns reflect our self-concern. Our feelings express our theology of comfort. “I could not talk to people about God. I just do not think that is

my gift. It would upset me too much.” Our anxiety becomes the focus of our attention.

Two factors are missing; two vital issues: Love for God and for people who do not know

Him. Love compels us to do what is not comfortable or easy for us.