

2: THE MISSION FIELD NEXT DOOR: The Land of Excuses

Last Sunday evening we explored the landscape here in Canada; we were reminded that we are to spread the Good News - the Gospel - to every nation and that our nation is included in that command our Lord gave to us.

We saw that there are deep problems here in our home and native land, that the news of the shed blood of Jesus and his miraculous resurrection are stories that our families, our neighbours and our countrymen and women need to hear.

We saw that Jesus' first big assignment to his disciples was to go out to their own communities and share the good news. We also recognized the need for those to share the gospel: **Matthew 9:37-38** **37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."**

It surely would have been daunting for the 12 disciples to move way out of their comfort zones and been put into situations they'd never been in before. Going out without funds and food, healing the sick and ministering to those they met as Jesus had instructed them, would have been frightening and they would have made excuses in their own minds I'm sure. But they went, because Jesus had commanded them to do so.

Tonight we are going to look at 6 common excuses and we'll see how the Bible addresses those.

1. I'm too young.

The prophet Jeremiah thought he was too young as well and he voiced it to the Lord. **Jeremiah 1:4-8** **"Now the word of**

the Lord came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord.””

Jeremiah was young; but when God calls anyone, including you and me, He promises us that he is there to deliver us, to help us, to guide us. As believers under the New Covenant, we have the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead and to guide us. And this leads to

2. I don't know enough yet.

It's not uncommon, in my experience, for even mature Christians to hesitate, to feel apprehension that they won't know what to say when hard questions come from non-believers who are curious or even hostile. When Jesus first sent out his 12 disciples to minister to their communities, even though they weren't experienced, he promised them, in **Matthew 10:20** that, **“It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”**

Get used to the fact that you will never know enough to adequately express the power and beauty of our Lord and his Gospel but that the indwelling Holy Spirit will speak through you and use you for His glory, if you let him! Get out of the way!

3. Fear of rejection and lost relationships

What an idolatrous fear this is. One teacher I heard refers to it as “The God of Pleasing Others”. Have you noticed how easy it is to make excuses; “I have to live/work with them.” “I don't want to hurt their feelings. And while it is true that we want to maintain

relationships with our unsaved loved ones and colleagues, isn't it important that we keep our priorities straight? Striving to please others instead of striving to serve the Lord is putting our feelings ahead of our responsibility to serve God.

Luke **9:57-62** tells us something of Jesus' approach to excuses: **57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus[a] said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."**

There is an urgency here; Jesus reminds us that the time is now; there is sacrifice involved (nowhere to lay his head), and that we need to focus and act.

The great American thinker and economist Thomas Sowell, who is a Christian, says, ***"When you want to help people, you tell them the truth. When you want to help yourself, you tell them what they want to hear."***

Do you want to help people come to a relationship with Jesus or are you trying to help and protect yourself? It's an important question with eternal consequences.

4. Fear of the spotlight

Some people like the spotlight but some of us come to it somewhat reluctantly. "Others are more capable or attractive, or

articulate, or knowledgeable” we might say. “I’m more of a behind the scenes kind of person; I’ll leave the spotlight for those who thrive there.”

Have you ever said any of these things or something similar? I am sure there are those here tonight who have! But stop that now! You are by no means the first to feel that way.

In Exodus, we read about Moses; he meets God in the burning bush and God instructs him that he is to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. Moses makes many excuses. So God shows Moses that his staff can turn into a serpent; Moses runs away from it. God shows him another miracle; he puts his hand inside his cloak and it becomes leprous. He puts it inside again and it comes out clean and healthy. He also shows him how to take water from the Nile, pour it onto the ground and it will become blood.

Nevertheless, even with these miracles available to him, Moses isn’t fully ready to take on the assignment God has given him.

Exodus 4:10-16 “10 But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue.” 11 Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? 12 Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak.” 13 But he said, “Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” 14 Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. 16 He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.”

God was adamant that Moses was his guy but Moses wasn't so sure. It's vital that you and I, when God calls **us** to serve, that we don't try to tell God what we can do or can't. He is able to supply all our needs and to equip us for the work he is calling us to do, even to supplying others to help us do HIS will.

5. I already give a lot and I volunteer too. I just don't have the time.

I hear you. God bless you for your giving and for your time. When someone says, however, I'm doing the best I can I want to ask whether that's really true. Is there anything more important than spreading the gospel? Is there anything you are doing that is wasting time doing things that are perishable rather than focusing on that which is eternal? Many of us are busy raising families, earning livings, paying bills, advocating for our children and grandchildren and these are important activities. We still need to ask, "How can I do better? How can I prioritize my time even more efficiently?" Jesus reminded us of that in **Luke 9:23-26** **"23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. 25 For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? 26 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."**

Is there even one more thing you can do better or add that serves Jesus?

6. I'm too old.

Many of you know the story of Caleb, son of Jephunneh. He was one of the spies Moses sent into the Promised Land to check it out before the Israelites entered. Caleb and Joshua, both young men at the time were in opposition to the rest of the spies. They believed that they should enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey (*Numbers 14*). And they nearly got stoned to death for their courage!

But it's the rest of the story we want to focus on here; over 40 years later, Joshua is assigning land to the Israelites. We pick up the story in Joshua **14:7-13**: This is Caleb speaking to Joshua, now the leader: **7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. 8 But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. 9 And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.'** **10 And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. 11 I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. 12 So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said."**

And as a result of this, Hebron became Caleb's inheritance. Notice that Caleb, perhaps with a bit of exaggeration, had a young attitude. He wanted to be involved and to faithfully serve the Lord.

Are you older? Ask yourself, what CAN I do? We are too frequently quick to find reasons that limit us; why not look for those reasons that enable us to serve, to help, to guide the younger generation, to be prayer warriors? I know several elderly folks in this church who faithfully take the weekly prayer list and make it a commitment to pray for those on the list every day. That's serving too, and in a very important way.

I hope you've noticed yourself in some of these common excuses and that this message convicts you of the opportunity to put first things first as Jesus requires we do.

Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness is a contact sport; most of us aren't designed to sit in isolation, reading the Bible and thinking deep theological thoughts. While this has its place, the Bible's message is a living, breathing, involved one, requiring us to serve the Lord in the ways that we are asked to serve, even when it's uncomfortable.

Whether you are 15 or 105, God wants you to serve him, to help grow his kingdom in your family, your church, and your country. What is he calling you to do? Will you heed the call?

Next Sunday evening in the conclusion of this series, we'll discuss some of the opportunities available to us in our families, our neighbourhoods, and right here at Cedarview Community Church and ask some questions to help get us started on next steps. I pray that you'll join us next week and that you'll bring your

curiosity, and willingness to follow Jesus where he wants you to be whether it's right here or somewhere else.

Let's pray...