

Sermon: “WORD and DEED”¹

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Introduction

Christians must always turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for direction, example and testimony in the great work of worldwide evangelization and missions. So tonight I want to take us to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in Acts chapter 1, verse 1. I believe it is foundational to the purpose of Canada Christian Vision Foundation as an organization.

I want to begin by borrowing two stories told by that amazing missiologist, Roger Greenway.² The stories come from West Africa.

The first story:

One beautiful Sunday morning, I watched hundreds of people arriving for worship in a West African town. “How was the church started?” I asked. “Who first brought the gospel here?”

The answer was this: “A woman missionary came to this town, and she was a nurse. Before she arrived, half of our children died before they reached the age of five. Then the missionary vaccinated our children. She taught the mothers how to keep their children healthy. She kept our babies from dying, and she taught us about God.”

The church in that village was started through missions by word and deed.

The second story:

I visited an elderly man in a slum where most of the people are Muslim. He, along with his four sons and their wives and children, had all become Christians. I asked the man what led him to leave Islam and put his faith in Jesus Christ.

¹ This sermon was first delivered 8 June, 2012 at a special meeting for Canada Christian Vision Foundation at Open Heart Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Ontario. Canada Christian Vision Foundation is a word and deed mission to Northeast Asia.

² Roger S. Greenway, *Go and Make Disciples! An Introduction to Christian Missions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999), 123-124.

He told me this story: “Christians came every week to our community and taught the Bible to a few Christians who lived here. They saw we were very poor, and they helped everyone. They helped the Christians, and they helped us Muslims. They did not charge anyone.

“For a long time I watched them to see what trick they intended to play on us. It made no sense to me that they helped Muslims and Christians in the same way, and without making us pay. There had to be a motive for the things they were doing.

“One day I asked them, ‘Why are you doing this? What is your motive?’ They answered me, ‘We do it because God cares for everybody. God cares so much that He sent Jesus to save us by dying and paying for our sins.’

“God cares, and Jesus paid! That was a motive I had never heard before. I began to believe it was true. I started to pray to God in the name of Jesus Christ. My sons followed my example, and that is how we became Christians.”

Here is the point:

Missions by word and deed makes a powerful witness to Jesus Christ. It has opened up homes, towns, and nations to the gospel. It follows the example of Jesus himself, who “went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matthew 9:35).

Now let us turn back to our Scripture text for tonight, Acts 1:1 –

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . . (NIV)

Of course the book of Acts is about evangelization, church-planting, and missionary work. It is also about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in evangelization, church-planting and missionary work. But it is still a book primarily about Jesus Christ – the fact that it is Jesus Christ Who, as Head of the Church, is building His Church and extending it. Verse 1 of Acts identifies Jesus Christ as the centre of the book, just as Jesus Christ was the centre of Luke’s other book, the Gospel of Luke. It is not a book about Theophilus but about Jesus Christ and the Kingdom.

Let us look at three things tonight:

- #1. Jesus Declares the Word – And What This Means for Us**
- #2. Jesus and His Deeds – And What This Means for Us**
- #3. Canada Christian Vision Foundation – Our Place in Missions**

#1. Jesus Declares the Word – And What This Means for Us (verse 1)

Quickly review the life of Jesus Christ from the commencement of His public ministry until the 40th day when He ascended into heaven. The immediate thing anyone will conclude in reading the four gospels is that Jesus was a teacher, a preacher, an instructor, a proclaimer. Mark chapter 1, verse 15 makes this abundantly clear. The first thing Jesus did when He began public ministry in Galilee was to make a great proclamation, that is He began with the Word, speaking about the Good News and saying, “*The time has come, ... the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!*” Now, Jesus Christ is our director, example, and testimony in missions. Speaking His Word must not be forgotten in missions. If it is, we are on a slippery-slope to forgetting that there is a great spiritual poverty in this world. Men and women truly need the **WORDS** of Jesus Christ.

Here are some of those words of Jesus:

- “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”
- “I am the Door.”
- “Repent and Believe.”
- “It is written – Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”
- “Follow Me.”
- “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life . . .”
- “Go and make disciples of all nations . . .”

We could keep going. But the point has been made. **The words of Jesus confront people. The words of Jesus disturb people. The words of Jesus are a great blessing to people.** Luke was wanting to make it very clear that he was telling Theophilus the words of Jesus – all that Jesus taught both publicly and privately. The verbal or written proclamation of Jesus must ever be part of our Christian witness.

You may well recall in that famous document produced in 1974 called “The Lausanne Covenant”, article 4 is on “The Nature of Evangelism”. Let me quote to you what Billy Graham, John Stott, and others composed:

“But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship.”³

The Lausanne Covenant accords with Scripture and with the example of Jesus Christ – He went about teaching and proclaiming the Word. On some occasions we have more freedom to do this than on other occasions. **We just**

³ For the Lausanne Covenant, see <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lausanne-covenant.html> .

have to learn to be wise, creative and dependent upon the Lord, for He opens the doors and the hearts for the Word to go forth. There are many missionaries who are not pastors, but every missionary **MUST** be Word-focused. Recognize that you must yourself study the Word of God and study with great care the life of Jesus. Recognize that you are to seek out opportunities to communicate verbally to unbelievers about Christ. The Word must be central to our missions or we will become a secular social agency and lose sight of the Kingdom mandate of Jesus Christ, the Way of salvation for sinners.

#2. Jesus and His Deeds – And What This Means for Us (verse 1)

Secondly, Acts 1:1 tells us that Luke wrote about “all that Jesus began to *do*”. What kinds of things did Jesus *do*? Answer –

- He healed people.
- He drove out demons.
- He fed people.
- He prayed.
- He went to the cross.

We must again study carefully the four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and see what specific deeds Jesus did for others. As we study this, we see that Jesus showed mercy, compassion, kindness, love, respect and care.

I remind you that Jesus associated with lepers, something unheard of! See Mark 1:40 and the encounter of Jesus and the man with leprosy. The Scripture tells us in verse 41 that Jesus was “*filled with compassion*” towards the leper. This is an eternal reminder of how Christians must deal with the diseased, the sick and the dying. We minister by deeds of mercy and compassion. This is part of the mandate of Canada Christian Vision Foundation.

Allow me to make reference once again to the Lausanne Covenant of 1974. The very next article after number 4 on evangelism is number 5, entitled “Christian Social Responsibility”. This article is very well worded and reflects a penetratingly clear and well-crafted statement for missions today. Article 5 affirms that we are all made in the image of God and we should respect and serve all people. John 4 shows the respect which Jesus accorded the Samaritan woman. Article 5 goes on to affirm that evangelism (Word) is not mutually exclusive to social concern (deed). Faith without works is dead (James 2:20), and we must not divorce evangelism from social concern. It is because of the Word of God that we undertake deeds of compassion, mercy, and instruction for lifting others up. Our theology of the Word governs our social deeds in missions. Thus we agree that “*both evangelistic and social involvement are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and humankind . . . , of our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ*”

(John Stott).⁴ As Christians we must be concerned about being salt and light here on earth. Every word we proclaim, every deed we undertake is spreading salt and light upon the earth (Matthew 5:13).

#3. Canada Christian Vision Foundation – Our Place in Missions

Finally, I want to draw out applications for us here tonight, specifically for Canada Christian Vision Foundation. I will make a list of several affirmations. It is not exhaustive but at least a starting point.

- 1.) As believers in Jesus Christ, the only Way, **we start with our relationship with the Son of God.** There is much humanitarian work done by many organizations, but the starting point for these organizations is not Christ (although there may be Christians involved). **Our starting point is Jesus Christ,** and thus for a Christian organization this means that all involved in governance and as missionary practitioners have a living and growing faith relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We profess faith and love for Him and desire to walk obediently in His will and commands. This sets us apart from humanitarianism – the starting point is fundamentally different – we live by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 2.) From our relationship to Christ will overflow love and compassion to the **spiritually** impoverished and to the **physically** impoverished. We do not separate these needs – both spiritual and physical impoverishments are real for us as Christians.
- 3.) **Thus we cannot separate the word from the deed.** We are here as believers to address both. We are thus **holistic**⁵ in our very core values as Christians. As Roger Greenway wrote:

A “holistic” way to do missions recognizes that both the spiritual needs and the material needs of human beings are real and important. It is not biblical to ignore one or the other.⁶

- 4.) We affirm that there are **diversities of callings for believers.** Yes, some are preachers, but there are other ways of being missionaries for Christ. We want to see those with medical backgrounds and those

⁴ John Stott, *For the Lord We Love: your study guide to The Lausanne Covenant* (The Lausanne Movement, 2009), 28.

⁵ It is very common in Latin-American missiology to use the term “integral” in mission rather than “holistic/wholistic”. See C. René Padilla, “Introduction: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission”, in *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission*, eds. Tetsunao Yamamori and C. René Padilla (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2004), 19-20. See Book Briefs, p. 132.

⁶ Greenway, 125.

with nutritional, children's, youth and seniors' backgrounds raised up by the Lord as missionaries in word and deed.

- 5.) **The whole redeemed Church family is to be seen as a mobilized, missional community.** Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church. He is making us into a new family. We want a mission to labour in unity under Jesus' headship. Therefore, respect the diversity of callings in missionary societies and agencies across the whole family of God. We want the whole family mobilized for mission. Canada Christian Vision Foundation can help mobilize some of God's family for mission work in Northeast Asia, but we respect and are one with any others who are spreading the Gospel. We must never see ourselves as the only mission group – God has others.
- 6.) The work of Canada Christian Vision Foundation must be undertaken with **prayer, planning, and praise.** **Prayer** is our dependence upon the Lord. We are a Christian organization. **Planning** involves much more for Christians than strategy meetings. Planning for Christians requires spiritual discernment, which involves humility in waiting together for unity in the Lord's will and honest assessment, again together. **Praise** is directed to God's glory for every victory we see in Canada Christian Vision Foundation. It is not about us; it is about the Lord receiving the glory and honour.

In conclusion, let me remind you where we started tonight, Acts 1:1 –

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . . (NIV)

1. **Jesus Declares the Word – And What This Means for Us**
2. **Jesus and His Deeds – And What This Means for Us**
3. **Canada Christian Vision Foundation – Our Place in Missions**

Canada Christian Vision Foundation is called to a carefully balanced ministry of **word** and **deed** to the whole person through medical and social missions. May the Lord be honoured; may the Kingdom be extended in Northeast Asia; may workers be raised up by the Lord; and may unity and large-heartedness be evidenced.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this special inaugural event. Let us pray.