

Simple Evangelism Series #17
At Some Point, Save Somebody!
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. This will be the last lesson in the series I call, “Simple Evangelism”

1. I want to stress again that I did not call it “Easy Evangelism”
 - a. the truth is that evangelism is not easy
 - b. it always requires a great deal of effort, and we must deal with the reality that not every effort to reach the lost succeeds
2. However, I do believe that evangelism must be simpler than we’ve made it
 - a. simpler in the sense that we ought to do everything we can to open doors, soften hearts, engage people with respect, show the love, mercy and grace of God, and use every available tool to reach out to people who are not saved
 - b. simpler in the sense that we need to move evangelism up to a greater emphasis and higher priority
 - c. simpler in the sense that we need to see anew what we’re supposed to be doing for lost people
 - d. simpler in the sense that evangelism must become our operating mindset and heartset by which we relate to others
 - e. we need to get out of the habit of looking for the expert to come do the job for us, or thinking that it’s a task beyond us

B. Tonight’s lesson has just one simple goal: to help us realize that at some point we must save somebody

1. I know that sounds unnecessary, but the truth is that modern Christians have developed the habit of talking, studying, thinking, planning, etc., but little actual doing what evangelism is all about
2. We must get it in our heads and hearts that all our efforts must have a real, discernable goal of actually saving people
 - a. unless that happens, then all our efforts have failed
 - b. evangelism may be difficult, but it’s not impossible
 - c. we might create unrealistic expectations, and dream of reaching scores and scores of people
 - d. but surely we must reach some – and that’s the point

C. Let me challenge you tonight to put faces and names on people we need to reach with the gospel of Jesus – then let’s work to see the saved

I. THE PARABLE OF THE ORANGE GROVE

- A. Years ago, someone shared a little story with me that illustrates the modern condition of many Christians and the congregations they make up
1. It's called the Parable of the Orange Grove
 2. It's full of satire, irony and criticism, but it's done in a way that helps us face the problems all too real in today's church

B. The Parable of the Orange Grove

I dreamed I drove on a Florida road, still and straight and empty. On either side were groves of orange trees, so that as I turned to look at them from time to time, line after line of orange trees stretched back endlessly from the road- their boughs heavy with round orange fruit. My wonder grew as the miles slipped by. How could the harvest be gathered?

Suddenly I realized that for all the hours I had driven (and that is how I knew I must be dreaming) I had seen no other person. No other car had passed me. No houses were to be seen along the highway. I was alone in a forest of orange trees.

But at last I saw some orange pickers. Far from the highway, almost on the horizon, lost in the vast wilderness of unpicked fruit, I could discern a tiny group of them working steadily. Many miles later I saw another group of them. I could not be sure, but I suspected the earth beneath me was shaking with silent laughter at the hopelessness of their task. Yet the pickers went on picking.

The sun had passed its zenith, and the shadows were lengthening when, without any warning, I turned a corner of the road to see a notice, "Leaving NEGLECTED COUNTY Entering HOME COUNTY."

The contrast was so startling that I scarcely had time to take in the notice. I had to slow down, for all at once the traffic was heavy. People by the thousands swarmed the road and crowded the sidewalks.

Even more extraordinary was the transformation in the orange groves. Orange groves were still there in abundance, but now, far from being silent and empty they were filled with the laughter and singing of multitudes of people. Indeed, it was the people I noticed more than the trees. People and houses.

I parked the car at the roadside and mingled with the crowd. Smart gowns, neat shoes, showy hats, expensive suits, and starched shirts made me feel a little conscious of my work clothes. Everyone seemed so fresh...so poised and happy.

"Is it a holiday?" I asked a well dressed woman with whom I fell in step.

She looked a little startled for a moment, then her face relaxed with a smile of condescension.

"You're a stranger, aren't you?" she said; and before I could reply, "This is Orange Day."

She must have seen a puzzled look on my face, for she went on,

"It's so good to turn aside from ones labors and pick oranges one day of the week."

"But don't you pick oranges everyday?" I asked her.

"One may pick oranges anytime," she said. "We should always be ready to pick oranges, but Orange Day is the day we devote especially to picking oranges."

I left her and made my way farther among the trees. Most of the people were carrying a book beautifully bound in rich leather, and edged and lettered in gold. I was able to discern on one of them the words, "Orange Picker's Manual."

By and by I noticed around one of the orange trees that seats had been arranged in tiers, rising upward from the ground. The seats were almost full, but as I approached the group a smiling well-dressed man shook my hand and conducted me to a seat.

There, around the foot of the orange tree I saw a number of people. One of them was addressing all the people on the seats, and just as I got to my seat, everyone rose to their feet and began to sing. The man next to me shared his song book with me. It was called, "Songs of the Orange Groves."

They sang for some time, and the song leader waved his arms with strange and frenzied abandon, all the while encouraging the people to sing more loudly.

I grew steadily more puzzled. "When do we start picking oranges?" I asked the man who had loaned me his book.

"It's not long now," he told me. "We like to get everyone warmed up first. Besides, we want to make the oranges feel at home." I thought he was joking, but his face was serious.

After a while another man took over from the song leader, and, after reading two sentences from a well-thumbed copy of the Orange Picker's Manual began to make a speech. I wasn't clear whether he was addressing the people or the oranges.

I glanced around me and saw a number of groups similar to our own group gathering around an occasional tree, and being addressed by speakers. Many trees had no one around them.

"Which trees do you pick from?" I asked the man beside me. He did not seem to understand the question, so I pointed to the trees round about.

"This is our tree," he said, pointing to the tree we were gathered around.

"But there are too many of us to pick from just one tree." I protested. "Why, there are more people than oranges!"

"But we don't pick oranges," the man explained. "We haven't been called. That's the Head Orange Picker's job. We're here to support him. Besides, we haven't been to college. You need to know how an orange thinks before you can pick it successfully. Orange psychology, you know. Most of these folks here," he went on, pointing to the congregation,

"have never even been to Manual School."

"Manual School?" I whispered. "What's that?"

"It's where you go to study the Orange Picker's Manual," my informant went on. "It's very hard to understand. You need years of study before it makes any sense."

"I see," I murmured. "I had no idea picking oranges was so difficult."

The speaker in front was still making his speech. His face was red, and he seemed to be indignant about something. So far as I could gather, there was rivalry with some of the other orange picking groups. But a moment later a glow came onto his face.

"But we are not forsaken," he said. "We have much to be thankful for. Last week we saw THREE ORANGES BROUGHT INTO OUR BASKET. And, too, we are completely debt free from the money we owed on the new seat cushions which grace the seats you now sit on."

"Isn't it wonderful?" the man sitting next to me murmured. I personally felt that something was profoundly wrong here. All of this seemed to be a very roundabout way of picking oranges.

The speaker was reaching a climax in his speech. The atmosphere seemed tense. Then, with a very dramatic gesture he reached two of the oranges, plucked them from the branch, and placed them in the basket at his feet. The applause was deafening.

"Do we start picking now?" I asked my informant.

"What in the world do you think we've been doing for the past forty minutes?" he hissed. "What do you suppose this tremendous effort has been made for? There's more orange picking talent in this group than in the rest of HOME COUNTY. Thousands of dollars have been spent on the tree you're looking at."

I apologized quickly. "I wasn't being critical," I said. "And I'm sure the speaker must be a very good picker. -But surely the rest of us could try. After all, there are so many oranges that need picking. We each have a pair of hands, and we can read the manual."

"When you've been in the business as long as I have, you'll realize it's not as simple as all that," he replied. "There isn't time, for one thing. We have our work to do, our families to care for, and our homes to look after. We..."

But I wasn't listening. Light was beginning to dawn on me. Whatever these people were, they weren't orange pickers. Orange picking was just a form of weekend entertainment for them...or maybe a group in which to find a shared identity.

I tried a few more of the groups around the trees. Not all of them had such high academic standards for orange pickers. Some even had classes for orange picking.

I tried to tell them about the trees I had seen in NEGLECTED COUNTY, but they seemed to have little interest.

"We haven't picked the oranges here yet." was their usual reply.

The sun was almost setting in my dream, and, growing tired of all the noise and activity around me I got back into my car and drove back the way I had come. Soon all around me were the vast and empty orange groves.

But there were changes. Some things had happened in my absence. Everywhere the ground was littered with fallen fruit. And as I watched, it seemed the trees began raining oranges. Many of them lay rotting on the ground.

I felt there was something so strange about it all; and my bewilderment grew as I thought about all the people in HOME COUNTY.

Then, booming through the trees there came a voice which said, "THE HARVEST TRULY IS PLENTEOUS, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW. PRAY YE THEREFORE THE LORD OF THE HARVEST, THAT HE MIGHT SEND FORTH LABORERS...."

And I awakened- for it was only a dream.

II. THE BIBLICAL BASE FOR SAVING THE LOST

A. Jude 20-23

20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; 23 save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. NASU

1. That's powerfully descriptive language – "snatching them out of the fire"
2. That's exactly what we do when we reach a sinner with the gospel
3. Want to make it even more powerful – put a name and a face on the person you snatch out of the fire!

B. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. NASU

1. God reconciled the world to himself in Christ Jesus
2. He committed to us the word of reconciliation
3. As ambassadors, we must appeal to people with names and faces!

C. Matthew 4:19

19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."
NASU

1. This call is for more than just those first disciples – it's for all of us
2. We need to think about this
 - a. what would you think about a fisherman who never caught a fish
 - b. what about a carpenter who never built anything
 - c. what about a salesman who never sold anything
 - d. what about barber who never cut anybody's hair
 - e. you see at some point, it all gets down to doing to, or with, or for somebody what you claim to be doing

CONCLUSION

A. In this series, I've tried to give you some tools, some resources to help make the job of evangelizing others simpler

1. I've said, do all you can use all the tools possible to open doors – but now you've got to put a name and a face on the person behind the door
2. I've said, use tools to establish trust, build relationships and more – but now you've got to put a name and a face on the person with whom you will do those things
3. I've said, it all gets down to this: at some point, save somebody – so put a name and a face on someone you want saved

B. Begin to focus your attention on specific people, and then begin using the ideas we've talked about

1. Pray for yourself and for the people you want to reach
2. Ask God's blessings on your efforts to reach out to people
3. Pray hard, use names, be specific, and then do the hard work of creating the situation in which you can tell that person about Jesus
4. Remember that our job is to sow the seed, but you have to sow!!

C. Invitation