

To Every Tribe

February 17, 2010

Wilkinson Update: Local Evangelism to Catholics, Mormons, and Pentecostals

Dear Brethren,

Thank you so much for your involvement in our ministry. As you know, our desire is to be in New Guinea to make the true and living God known to the unreached tribes. We are thankful for the opportunities we have to glorify God every day here in the USA while we're training. I wanted to give a short update on some of our very recent evangelistic efforts in Texas. It's unnatural for me to write to you all about this since I don't wish to "sound a trumpet" (Matthew 6:2) about the work I do for the Lord. My intention is to glorify God, to sharpen you and exhort you to glorify God in your sphere of influence, and to be accountable to my supporters. I don't want anyone to picture us as idling or quietly waiting. I'm doing the work of an evangelist prior to getting to the field, because my ministry and service starts now. If any of you aspire to be missionaries (and I greatly hope that some of you do), you must know that if you find it difficult to share the gospel with your own countrymen, than you'll have a much more difficult time trying to preach Christ across culture and language boundaries. Start practicing now. Perhaps the Lord will save people through you right here! Maybe the following testimonies will help you in some way.

The Lord has given us diverse witnessing opportunities recently. I/we shared the gospel this month with Catholics, Mormons, and Pentecostals (who did not believe the true gospel). I had to keep shifting my thinking as I tried to share the Scriptures that addressed the errors of each of their worldviews. Here are some accounts of these interactions:

The Catholics: This week while on a walk with the family, we met a group of older Mexican men sitting outside their houses. They were pleased to see us and we spoke with them the best we could in a few Spanish phrases and through their limited English. They enjoyed our children; one man said that Jacy looked like a doll- everyone likes her curls. I explained where we live and that we're missionaries. I gave the five men Spanish tracts and they seemed to be reading them. This "method" of meeting people in our neighborhood and sharing a tract or having a conversation about the Lord has been my most consistent and effective outreach. People always seem to be drawn to us because of our children. Last week I started talking to a Catholic couple in a fast food restaurant and was able to share that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The man seemed to understand and invited me to come to his house some time to share more and to show him photos of Papua New Guinea. His wife worships "the Saint of the Last Days" and didn't respond to my fifteen minute teaching (her English may not have been good enough to understand me, though). The man said he does not worship this particular saint. There is a huge Catholic influence in this part of the country, and many people here choose a particular saint to worship, often times "the Saint of Death." This is a cult that was recently condemned by some Catholic leaders, but had been formerly acceptable to them. When asked if one is a Christian, Catholics here say "No, I am a Catholic." The division is clearer to the people here. Most Catholics cannot tell me what "the gospel" is they attempt to explain it, the story will usually involve their traditions. I've found that Catholics here are open about being saved by

Jesus *and* their own good deeds. They also believe that the sacrifice of the Mass atones for sins and, as stated earlier, they openly venerate and pray to the saints, including Mary, (who is sometimes called by Catholics the Co-redemtrix, the Queen of Heaven, or the Door of Heaven) and also the Saint of Death. Please pray that the Lord would give us more opportunities to share the true gospel with the Catholics here.

The Mormons: Leanne was out walking one evening a couple of weeks ago and met two Mormon young men coming out of a house. She spoke with them and invited them to speak with me at our house, so they made an appointment for a few days later. She told them that we are Christians who have studied Mormonism and would tell them the truth. Hoping they would keep the appointment, I brushed up on Mormonism and studied relevant Scripture. I asked my friend Scott to join the study. The two men, “Elder Merservy” (20) and “Elder (Adam) Wilcox” (19) came and Scott and I spoke with them in our agency classroom for over an hour. I asked them first what “the gospel” is and they said that it was a difficult question, but that “the gospel is what we are supposed to do.” I presented the Biblical gospel to them for about fifteen minutes and they listened. When asked what they thought about this gospel they said that they agreed with what I said. Again and again they confirmed that they agree and that our message and our mission is the same with theirs. Scott and I then confronted them with the huge, fundamental differences between the true Church and the Church of Jesus Christ and the Latter Day Saints (Mormonism). They acknowledged that they believe in countless gods of countless planets, that Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit are the three earth gods that they worship, and that through following Christ in this life, they aspire to reach godhood themselves in the afterlife. They also said people are “saved” by following the path of righteousness, along with one’s belief in the atonement of Christ. We had to work hard with them for them to acknowledge how different they are from Christians. Mormons really seem to me like they are almost polytheistic Catholics: Mormons also have a priesthood, they baptize people for salvation, (they even baptize for the dead) they mix faith and works for salvation, they talk a lot about the gospel, but define it differently, the words of their church authorities are to them the very word of God, they tend to lean towards eventual universalism, and they seem to be very liturgical. We showed them many verses about God being the one and only God and about salvation being by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ. All seemed to be of no avail, but we set up another meeting with them and prayed aloud with them for their salvation before they left.

These Mormon guys came to our house last Tuesday night and we got to know them over supper. Then Leanne and I reasoned with them from the Scriptures and pleaded with them to hear the true gospel. They continually spoke of their testimony and their experiences with the book of Mormon, which in their mind confirms the inspiration of the book of Mormon. I pointed out some contradictions between Scripture and their other “scriptures,” and we told them that they are deceived by Satan into believing “another gospel.” (Galatians 1) They had us listen to audio messages from a conference. The “prophet” spoke lies and twisted the Scriptures, yet they said his teaching is inspired by God. The men thought this message might convince us of the truth of Mormonism, but we continued to tell them they are deceived. They continued to say they thought we served the same God. We showed them that we can’t serve the same God, since their description of the Godhead is completely different from the Biblical Godhead. We prayed for them, they prayed for us (without our participation). Both sides concluded that it would take an act of God Himself to convince the other side to convert. We have each left the matter in the Lord’s hands. We would ask, however, that you pray particularly for young Adam Wilcox, who at times seemed unconvinced by the explanations of his friend. He also had a more pleasant, less deceived spirit about him.

The Pentecostals: On January 31, our family stopped at Walmart to pick up a few things. An employee was gathering carts and admired our three girls, who were in my cart. He considered our little family to be big. I started talking about children being a blessing from the Lord and mentioned that God commanded man to be fruitful and multiply. He said he saw that I am “a man of God.” I spoke to him about the gospel and asked if he is a Christian, too. He said he’s Pentecostal and that he’d like me to go with him to his church for the evening service that night. I agreed and met him there. I hoped, of course, to see if this church preached the gospel and to witness to people there if the teaching of Christ’s saving atonement was neglected. I arrived late since I got lost in the small streets near the border of Mexico where the church is. Once I was near the building, the loud praise band led me to the right place. I was the only white person there, which was fine by me. My new friend told me that it is a bilingual service, but everything was Spanish. A woman was asked to translate for me, so I was able to get the gist of things. There was a long powerful sermon about nothing. There was no Biblical focus or lessons. People were told to sow seeds to reap the harvest, which they meant as giving money, then the preacher said that precious stones and gold dust were regularly being manifested to people in the church (appearing out of thin air). A horrible movie clip was shown about drug addicts without much application. During the message I mentioned to the man who invited me that I’d love to give a testimony, if that is something that’s practiced there. He thought it would be a good idea and had me ask a woman to set it up. I was so excited and I began to plan some passages to cover if they let me preach. It never happened, though, and as I met the preacher afterwards, who calls himself a “revival apostle,” he said, “Oh, the famous Matt who wished to share a testimony.” He said there was no time tonight, but said he could give me a little time the next Sunday night. I agreed and told him about our missions plans. I tried to discuss the gospel, but he seemed to change the subject or talk with someone else each time. I then passed out some Spanish tracts with a very clear gospel message and headed home. I was tired after the three hour service.

The following Sunday I went to the evening service again and this time I was prepared with my own interpreter, my great friend Lexye from Cuba. I understood much more and still there was nothing said about salvation or the true gospel. During the loud singing the pastor told me he can give me five minutes to share. I was called up a few minutes later and the pastor interpreted for me (Lexye said he did a good job with it). I introduced myself and told them of our family and plans to go to New Guinea. I told them about the Bena tribe that I visited in Papua New Guinea and how I was healed of a fever by God when the pastor and brethren prayed for me while laying on hands and anointing me with oil (James 5). The congregation loved to hear this and were very vocal about it. Then I told them that the greatest miracle of all is Jesus saving men from judgment. I presented a holy God who made everything, man’s rebellion, man’s subsequent need for forgiveness of sin and that only God could pay our debt. I told of Jesus’ perfect life and His atoning death on the cross. I implored them to repent and believe in Christ. The whole thing was a little over five minutes, but I know God will use it in some way. Having the pastor interpret for me may have given the message some validity in their eyes. The rest of the service did not seem affected by what I had just said. The sermon, presentation, prayers, and featured movie clip were devoid of the things of God and His gospel. In fact, much of it was contrary to Biblical teaching. Surprisingly, the pastor said they didn’t hear enough from me and he asked me to come and share again at a missions day! We may be moved away by then, but we’ll see. I learned from all this that we need to be sharing Christ everywhere, even in places where we might think that people hear the gospel regularly. Remember that not all churches preach Christ and not every church member is a true child of God.

Some might think that such evangelistic work is only for an evangelist. I want to tell you how I have such opportunities. My work is the result of praying each day that God would glorify Himself in me. God is the one doing the work through this weak vessel. I ask God for someone to share the gospel with each day and He provides the opportunities, the boldness, and the message. In times when others don't have time to talk I can provide a gospel tract, but often I'm able to share the bad news and then the good news (the gospel) verbally. Last night, for example, I was invited to a college campus by fellow believers from church and I saw how great the harvest is there. As I walked around I talked to students about the gospel and passed out tracts. What a blessing that was to me!

Wherever we are we must shine for God there and seek opportunities to share His love. **Come on out and catch some men with me!**

“And [Jesus] said unto them, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ Mark 16:15

To God be the glory,

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