

EVANGELISM'S FLIPSIDE

A Journey of Reaping the Unexpected



JOHN JAY RICCI

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By

JOHN JAY RICCI

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Address All Inquiries To:
THE OLD PATHS PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
142 Gold Flume Way
Cleveland, Georgia, U.S.A.
E-mail: TOP@theoldpathspublications.com

Distributors and other information here:
Web: www.theoldpathspublications.com

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Dedication

This is my first book on this subject and I want to dedicate it above all else to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God's precious Son whose love and grace towards me made this all possible. I also dedicate this to the late Barbara A. Ricci, my beloved mom whose selfless love, sacrifice and investment in my life paved the way for a project like this to come to fruition. Finally, I dedicate this to the rest of my family, friends and the faithful men and women of God past and present who have been a great blessing and encouragement as I sought the furtherance of the everlasting gospel.

Introduction

In the New Testament, Hebrews 10:24 says, “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.*” The Greek term for *provoke* comes from the root *paroxuno* which means “to sharpen alongside; to stir up.” I want to assure you I am not claiming to have “arrived” and the Lord knows that I do not see myself as an expert evangelist. So while I seek to stir up my fellow saints I will also get sharpened along the way. My twofold purpose in writing this book is first to help Christians to *recognize* and then *seize* the opportunities right in front of them so they can enjoy a benefit of evangelism that much of Christendom has largely forgotten about today.

Too many of us have inoculated ourselves from the exploits awaiting us because we have convinced ourselves to accept the lie that because soul winning is a command of our Lord, then by default it must be dull or boring. My goal throughout this book is to show you otherwise. As you read about the adventures I’ve been on and the fruit it has stirred, not just around me, but *in* me, my prayer is that it will likewise produce a desire in you to open your own evangelism treasure chest. Bible believers know that taking part in the Great Commission as a soul winner is not an option but a responsibility. However, I do not think Christians should obey out of guilt or even out of fear of divine

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chastisement as these are very poor motivators. We ought to obey out of *love* for our Saviour and for the expectation of the heavenly power and joy we will overflow with too! Sadly, in many Christian circles today there seems to be a “hands-off” approach to reaching people for Christ. These Christians want to show the gospel in their behavior instead of telling the gospel with their words. I believe these Christians are cutting their blessings short when they take this approach. Not only this, but it is not biblical to reduce the Great Commission to “lifestyle evangelism” or a “social gospel” as if to assume the lost will someday “sense” their need of salvation solely by watching a Christian live their life. In addition, this is not the method Jesus Himself used. Our Lord didn’t wait six months or longer to “win over” people like Nicodemus or the woman at the well with His godly lifestyle, but He *spoke* the gospel to them the *same* day He met them (John 3:1-21; 4:5-29). Should we do any less?

The Bible teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom 10:17). In clear passages such as Ezekiel 3:18, Acts 4:20, 18:9 (and more) God plainly tells us to *speak* the truth in love to people so they will hear about the wonderful gift of salvation He wants them to have.

Someone may object here and claim Jesus gave the Great Commission only to the Apostles, and therefore it doesn’t apply to Christians today. This objection fails

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because Jesus told His Apostles that they were to go into all nations and make disciples and to teach their disciples to make more disciples and their disciples to make even more disciples on and on until the end of human history (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20). The Apostles themselves would die long before that time would come yet Jesus said He wanted the gospel preached all over the world until then. Thus He was giving clear instructions that wouldn't just apply to the first century Apostles, but to all Christian disciples since then. Do you claim to be a Christian and thus a disciple (follower) of Christ? If yes, then the Great Commission applies to you as it did the Apostles.

Another popular objection is: "We have to meet people's physical needs to earn the right to preach the gospel to them." Nowhere does the Bible teach that we have to "earn" such a right. Since Christ commanded us to preach the gospel to the lost, with that command comes the authorization as well, so we really do not have to wait for anyone else to give that to us! Furthermore, we do not see Jesus, the master soul winner waiting to "earn" the right before preaching the gospel to the lost souls around Him. In fact, on at least one occasion, it was only *after* three days of preaching that Jesus gave the people something to eat (Matt 15:32) because He wanted to emphasize the importance of proclaiming the gospel. Please don't misunderstand me here. Neither I nor the Bible is saying that living a

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godly life isn't important or that we shouldn't try to meet the temporal needs of people when possible. However, we must not prioritize the temporal *over* the eternal. Christians need to remember that it is vitally important that we give the lost an invitation to accept the gospel of Christ as that is God's primary focus.

Often we forget that our Lord's commands (especially concerning evangelism) are meant to fill up our joy not take it away. My desire in writing this book is to help change your perspective on soul winning and the Great Commission from: *we have to* instead to: *we get to*. Beloved, our Lord didn't give you commands to ruin your life, but to *enhance* it (John 10:10). Notice here in John 15:10-11 Jesus said, "*If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*"

Under the Old Covenant, God gave commandments to His people for their benefit (Deut 6:24) and it is no different for Christians under the New Covenant. God has orchestrated it in such a way that when we obey His command to be His witnesses, it is *we* who will have cause for celebration and rejoicing. The encounter between Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch is a good example of this. After Philip preached the gospel to the eunuch, and the eunuch got saved and

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baptized, the Bible says in Acts 8:39 that *“when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.”*

Someone may say, “Sure there’s a reason to rejoice when people respond to the gospel and you’re getting results, but how can you rejoice when nobody responds and you get no results?” While seeing results from your soul winning efforts is a reason to rejoice, the Bible shows us it is not the only reason to rejoice. Just because you don’t get a positive response to the gospel doesn’t mean you can’t rejoice. In Acts chapter five, the Apostles got assaulted and jailed for preaching the gospel. They weren’t seeing a lot of results, especially from the religious rulers (whom they were also trying to reach for Christ) right? However, after the religious leaders had the Apostles beaten Scripture says *“they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”* (Acts 5:41). So although the circumstances for the Apostles weren’t pleasant, and they weren’t seeing the results they wanted, they still had reason to be brimming with joy! Despite the persecution and the lack of results, the Apostles rejoiced because their obedience to the Great Commission took them on an adventure, and through it, they glorified God’s name.

Just like the Apostles, in order for today’s Christians to get and stay enthusiastic about the huge task of world

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evangelization, we must view each evangelism opportunity, not as another burden to carry but as a new adventure to experience. In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." So while I certainly believe in praying for more laborers I also believe in putting feet to my prayers and through this book, I am doing just that. I have a burden to see more Christians get passionate about what Jesus Himself was most passionate about, lost souls. It seems like the colder our Western society gets towards the things of God the more standoffish Christians get towards evangelizing it. But only fired-up Christians will melt the block of ice separating our society from the biblical gospel. It should be that the colder the society gets, the hotter our Christian witness gets. I'd like to encourage more Christians to not just obey the Great Commission out of duty, but be expecting to evangelize the next lost person God brings into their lives. I really like the book of Acts because it chronicles the adventures the early Christians experienced as they faithfully obeyed God's Great Commission mandate. In Acts chapter fifteen, while on their missionary journey to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas "*passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them*" (Acts 15:3-4).

Just by sharing what God had done with and for them while they were out witnessing, Paul and Barnabas had

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brought great joy and excitement to the brethren in their day. In this book with God's help, I too seek to do the same for my generation today. Now let's notice again the phrase "*all things that God had done with them*". This isn't only referring to the "conversion of the Gentiles" (i.e. what God did in and for the unsaved) but it also includes what God was doing in and through the saved (in this case Paul and Barnabas). From my experience, most Christians don't see evangelism as a two-sided coin that has blessings on both sides. Instead, most treat it like a one-sided coin and only focus on what God is doing in the lives of the lost they're trying to reach (or have reached) with the Gospel. Unfortunately, when this happens, Christians end up overlooking what's happening on the flipside. I hope to show in this book (through some personal stories) the types of joys and blessings simultaneously available on the *other* side of evangelism so believers can be inspired to be expecting and reaping these blessings in their own lives as well.

My prayer for you, dear reader and fellow saint in the Lord, is that you would not settle for only being excited about what God does in the lives of the unsaved you reach with the Gospel. But may you be equally excited or more so with what He will do in you, for you and through you as the Great Commission becomes a great commitment in your life. And to put feet to my prayers, I now share my adventures from the soul-winning trails so that you too may see the great things God has done.

When Your Light Shines

“To be a soul winner is the happiest thing in this world.”

Charles H. Spurgeon

Any student of the Bible knows that God says we are wise when we are soul winners (Prov 11:30) which is another term for being “fishers of men” (Matt 4:19). We can accomplish this using several creative methods. One of these ways is through public, open-air street evangelism which godly men of the past, such as George Whitefield and John Wesley did as well as the Lord Jesus and His Apostles.

One day, after a church service I met a Jewish Christian named Ben through Mike, our mutual Christian brother who (at the time) was heading off to Bible college. I discovered that Ben also loves to do open-air street ministry as I do, and we are an encouragement to one another since very few Christians today desire to do this front-line evangelism. Sadly, many Christians in this Laodicean (lukewarm) church age would rather keep their faith inside the walls of a church building and expect the lost to come to them than go out seeking the lost *where they are* like the Lord Jesus Himself did. Since Ben and I (at the time of this writing) live in Massachusetts, we coordinated a plan to meet together to do evangelism throughout the streets of downtown Boston, or Harvard Square in Cambridge or any other

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area with high foot traffic as the Lord would lead. Though (at the time of this writing) I use some creative witnessing tools that Open Air Campaigners, a local church/non-profit mission provides evangelists and occasionally team up with their local staff to do soul winning, I am not yet serving in evangelism full time, I still have a full-time secular job as does Ben. I still have a full-time secular job as does Ben. He has his own business and sometimes his schedule is different and more flexible than mine and he can get out to the streets before I am.

One day he was in downtown Boston with another Christian brother and together they were handing out tracts and witnessing. As they were doing this, a man named John approached him, and John told him he too was a Christian. He told them that just by seeing Ben out here giving out tracts; God had used this to convict John that he too needs to be out here doing this. Then three weeks later, while I was out doing street evangelism with Ben, John shows up in Boston again and greets Ben, and then Ben introduces John and then John joins us in passing out tracts! Then a short while later that evening, while John is giving tracts away, a man named Eli walks up to him. Eli is also a Christian and was in the area looking for a job. God used our example of being obedient to His Great Commission and this instantly convinces Eli (who had his Bible in his bag as well) that he should also join us as we hand

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out gospel tracts and witness for the Lord Jesus. So although Ben, John, Eli and I are involved in different churches outside of Boston, we all have the same burden for the souls of Boston and God has brought us together to encourage each other in soul winning. We still do street evangelism together as much as our schedules permit. None of us claims to be perfect, but as we strive together to further the gospel, Scripture tells us *“iron sharpeneth iron”* (Prov 27:17). Many Christians know that the *“harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few”* (Matt 9:37). And these same Christians pray for the Lord to *“send forth more labourers into his harvest”* (Matt 9:38) but when we put feet to our prayers head out to the harvest and *expect* more gospel workers, God *will* deliver in astounding ways! It was just amazing how He brought four Christians from different church backgrounds together to seek the lost, and it all began when each of us stepped out in obedient faith and let our individual candles burn bright. *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:16). Praise the Lord (PTL)!

***“I would rather win souls than be the
greatest king or emperor on earth; I
would rather win souls than be the
greatest general that ever
commanded an army; I would rather
win souls than be the greatest poet,
or novelist, or literary man who ever***

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walked the earth. My one ambition in life is to win as many as possible.²

R. A. Torrey

One Monday in December while I was at my 9-5 job in Boston I anticipated going soul winning with Ben (the Christian brother I mentioned earlier). The plan was to head to the famous Harvard Square in Cambridge, MA to do street ministry which would include open proclamation using an amplifier, handing out gospel tracts and getting into as many personal conversations as possible. Ben headed to Harvard Square ahead of me since he had the day off from work and I would meet him there after I finished work, but around 3 pm I got a text message on my phone from Ben saying he had to cancel because his brother's car had broken down. His brother and brother's girlfriend were stuck in Vermont, and he needed to drive up there and pick them up. So Ben had to leave Harvard Square to head up there, but the good news for Ben was that although he couldn't meet up with me, he would have three hours in the car to preach the gospel to his brother and his brother's girlfriend, both of whom were unsaved. I was excited for him, but a little disappointed because Ben's zeal for the Lord was an encouragement for me and it was a blessing to have him as a soul-winning partner. It would also bitterly cold outside this evening so that added to my disappointment. But then I sent a text message to two other Christian brothers, John, and Eli (whom I mentioned earlier), to see if they were up to coming out

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to Harvard Square with me. If I found no one else to join me I was ready to head home and attend to other things. But then I got a response from John saying he was up for some street evangelism, however, instead of Harvard Square he wanted to meet up in downtown Boston (on the Boston Commons just outside the Park Street train station). So I agreed, and when I met him there after work he had his two children, his wife and a women's leader from his church with him. His wife and this woman had a big pot of soup, and while we were doing evangelism, they went around serving soup to the homeless in the area that evening. Although John had brochures from his church (which at the time of this writing is a Pentecostal church) he encouraged his children to give out the gospel tracts from my church I brought with me. After I did a little open-air preaching, Eli showed up with his Bible, and he joined us in ministry, which was an extra blessing for sure. Though it was bitterly cold, we were all on fire for God that evening. By now it was around 7 pm and just before finishing up for the night and heading home, we met a homeless couple named Kevin and Michelle near an outdoor fruit cart. Boy did they have a story to tell! Kevin said that earlier in the day he stumbled upon an old silver dollar coin. At this point in their lives, he and his pregnant girlfriend Michelle were homeless and hungry and they were tempted to steal some food in order to eat. But then he felt God telling him that He would supply their needs. Kevin also said that he

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somehow knew that God was going to send someone to tell him more about Him. So Kevin got the idea that he should take the coin to some coin dealers in the Boston area and get the best price. After being offered three dollars by one dealer and five dollars by another dealer, he found a place that would give him eighteen dollars for the coin which he accepted. He used the money and bought some food for him and his girlfriend. Then God brought us together at the fruit stand, which was near the train station I was just about to enter to head home for the evening. Had I left, I wouldn't have been able to witness what happened next. We started talking to Kevin and Michelle about their eternal destiny. Kevin said he believed in some "higher power" (whom he called God) but wasn't sure what he believed about Jesus. Then John's wife, who had met up with us (after going around and serving soup to the homeless) also offered Kevin and Michelle a bowl of soup and they each gladly received the soup since they were very hungry and that is why they were at that fruit stand in the first place. So while they were there eating the hot soup, I opened my New Testament and began to talk with them about God's simple plan of salvation. Then Eli (who also had his Bible) showed them Romans 10:9 and asked them if they wanted to receive the gift of eternal life by placing their trust in Jesus. Kevin and Michelle affirmed that they did and right there Eli prayed with them as they publicly confessed their trust in Christ. After asking them some follow-up questions,

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the women's leader from John's church obtained their contact information to make arrangements to further assist and disciple them.

What began as a disappointing day turned into rejoicing by the end of the evening. I was all set to go home after work, a little discouraged because my soul winning partner had to cancel on me. Although Ben's zeal for evangelism is an encouragement, God showed me that ultimately I needed to rely on Him and His power alone. So by faith, I resolved to go and God brought John, Eli and the others to come alongside me that evening. And as a result, two more people came to trust Jesus for salvation and enter the family of God. Once again, the Lord showed me He is not looking for a person's ability, but their availability. Jesus said, "go ye" (Mark 16:15) and if we will just obey, He will do the rest. **PTL!**

One New Year's Eve

"If you have no joy, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere."³

Billy Sunday

One New Year's evening I joined up with a pastor friend of mine from Salem, MA, who had his son and one of his faithful men from their church alongside him. We were open-air preaching on the Commons in downtown Boston during the "First Night" activities. It was a bitterly cold night, as it usually is for this time of the year, and there were multitudes of people around to ring in the New Year. While we were there preaching using our portable voice amplifiers, we got swarmed by at least nine or ten self-proclaimed homosexual women. They were obviously drunk and yelling at us and trying to prevent us from preaching. One woman even pulled her pants down to flash us, but we looked away so we didn't see the perversion. However, as they were making a scene, a group of about seven teenagers stopped to observe what was going on. Seeing an opportunity, I engaged all seven in a gospel conversation. Several of the teens admitted that they had never previously spoken to anyone about Christ before. To some of you reading this book it may shock you to learn that there are *still* plenty of people in America who have not heard the biblical gospel even once. One boy in this group who never heard the good news before was a Catholic, so it was a blessing to plant