

Communicating a Burden for the Lost

~Jeff Jarmon

It was an interesting message for a Sunday evening. The title of the sermon was “Communicating a Burden for the Lost.” The visiting minister had provided a solid scriptural basis for his admonition and had shared a number of interesting illustrations. At the conclusion of the message, the speaker likely sat down feeling that he had covered the subject and things had gone well. After the message, the deacon stood and asked if anyone would like to share a testimony. I confess that I really cannot recall who said what in the first several testimonies. I remember clearly who shared last and what he said. He started his testimony with a shockingly frank statement. “I just want all of you to know that I cannot say I have a real burden for the lost.” His next statement would eclipse the first. “And frankly, I wonder if many of you all do.” The auditorium was silent as he continued. “The message tonight was on communicating a burden for the lost. I guess you can talk about the lost and all, but if I want to be sure to communicate to my neighbor that I have a new lawn mower, I do not just talk about it. I ride it around so he can see it.” He concluded, “I am going to pray that the Lord will give me a burden for the lost, and if He does give me a burden for the lost, you will know, not because I tell you, but you will know. You will see it.”

There were more than a few awkward moments after the service as individuals tried to relate to what they had just heard. The outspoken brother made us uncomfortable with his statements. First, that he didn’t have a “real burden for the lost.” He saw a burden as something heavy, and uncomfortable, something that requires constant attention and effort. By his definition, sharing a few words about the terrible fate of the lost during a Sunday School discussion did not “communicate a burden for the lost.” Communication of the burden occurs when it motivates you to share face to face about the terrible fate of the lost with your unsaved neighbor.

Secondly, we felt threatened by his assessment of our own burden for the lost. It forced us to recognize that others make an evaluation of our Christianity based on what they see in our life, not what they hear from our mouths. We would like to assume that every Christian has a deep burden for the lost. Second Peter 3:9 reminds us that the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. This implies both knowledge of the eternal damnation of the lost and a desire for a right response from those that are lost. While it was that knowledge and desire that “burdened” Christ, the burden was communicated when he was willing to die that the lost might gain eternal life. Most who were in the auditorium that night could have identified a number of individuals who were currently in a lost spiritual state. Like Jesus, we desired that they would repent and could enjoy eternity with God in heaven. The conflict came when we began to understand that “having a burden” is much different from “communicating a burden.” The question kept pressing upon us, what had we done in the way of “communicating a burden for the lost?”

Lastly, we did not know how to relate to his statement about praying to the Lord to give him a burden for the lost. Is that where we should turn to acquire a burden for the lost? Was that something that we should do also? And how would the Lord communicate His answer to our prayer? The final words of the brother’s testimony lingered. “. . .and if He does give me a burden for the lost, you will know, not because I tell you; but because you know. You will see it.”

The school year ended. The house was sold. Church sisters finished packing the dishes while the brethren carried out dressers, bed frames, mattresses, and lamps. Children carried out their favorite toys. Boxes were carefully positioned in the trailer for the long trip to the inner-city mission church several hours away. The doors were closed and the truck pulled out the drive. It was followed by a family who felt deep burden for those who needed to hear the Gospel. Did the outspoken brother really go home and pray for a burden for the lost? I suppose no one ever asked him. Did the Lord ever give him a burden for the lost? No one ever needed to ask him. We knew. Not because he told us, but because we saw it.

~ Barnett MO
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