

The Psalm we sang, “The Eyes of All Upon Thee Wait,” sets the stage for the sermon today, as it starts with *open eyes* in the first verse, and ends with *mouth and lips* that both praise God for what He has done *and also* exhort others to bless His name, too. That’s worship and mission – a heart for God and a heart for others. And so this hymn is a bridge between last week’s sermon and this week, going from open eyes to an open mouth.

This short series has been looking at what kind of people we need to be so that we are ready when God answers our prayers for open doors to share the gospel. We’re called to be open-hearted people that desire the salvation of our neighbors, open-eyed people who look for and identify others to share the gospel with, and today we’re hearing God speak through Philip the Evangelist and Paul the Missionary, who give us examples of what it looks like to have open mouths that share the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

There are a number of ways to open your mouth in the Christian life – encouraging, teaching, exhorting, rebuking, comforting, praising, lamenting, and so on. But specifically, our focus today is on open mouths that go through open doors to share the gospel. We’re talking about evangelism, which is what this series has led up to. We need evangelistic hearts and evangelistic eyes, but it’s all in preparation for opening our mouths. As Romans 10 says, “How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” The open mouth is what enables people to hear the good news and believe in Jesus, so that they can be saved.

And before we look at what sharing the gospel is, I want to clear away some debris first. Christians sometimes get confused when it comes to sharing the gospel, and we call a lot of things “evangelism” that aren’t actually evangelism: works of *mercy*, like feeding the hungry; works of *service*, like after-school tutoring. Sometimes people mistake acts of *witness* for evangelism; things like the March for Life or thanking Jesus after a victory or getting an award. Some people confuse *apologetics* with evangelism; defending Christian truth in discussions or debates. Still others think that they’re evangelizing by sharing their *testimony* or their own personal beliefs. Sometimes people consider any Bible *teaching* to be evangelism. I’m *talking* about evangelism right now, for instance, but I’m not actually *doing* evangelism, at least, not at this moment!

And I want to be clear: all of those things are good and necessary. They come from hearts that have been changed by the gospel of Jesus, and in many cases they *lead* to evangelism, but none of those things actually *are* evangelism until someone opens their mouth to tell non-Christians the good news about Jesus from the Bible.

That's my working definition of evangelism, coming straight from Philip in Acts 8:35:

Opening your mouth to tell non-Christians the good news about Jesus from the Bible.

That's what evangelism *is*, as an activity, and the *goal* of that activity, the goal of evangelism, is persuading unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel. If your activity isn't telling others the good news about Jesus, and if your goal isn't persuading them to believe in Jesus, then whatever you're doing, and however good it might be, it isn't evangelism. Evangelism necessarily involves **opening your mouth to tell non-Christians the good news about Jesus from the Bible.**

And one of the worst things in all the world is when Christians settle for being moralistic do-gooders instead of opening their mouths to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. When the gospel comes first, all these other things will be added unto you. But when these good things displace evangelism, then even if the Church is busy showing mercy, serving people, informing people about the Bible and telling them how to live, then she's gained the whole world and lost her soul. Sharing the good news about Jesus from the Scriptures so that people will repent and believe is *the one thing* that the Church does for non-Christians that no one else does, and so it's the one thing above all that she must prioritize and not lose sight of.

If this is the heart and soul of the Church's mission, then *why oh why* do we ever close our mouths? Why do I keep my mouth shut? And here I want you to look at Paul's prayer request in Eph. 6 to find some potential mouth-closers that we must avoid or overcome. Looking at what Paul prays for gives us a window into what the evangelist is up against.

I want to point out four things from this prayer: words, boldness, mystery, and chains. First, Paul wants the Ephesians to pray that *words* would be given to him. So often, when it comes to evangelism, we feel like *we don't know what to say*. Paul felt that way too, and so he asked the Church to pray so that God would open His mouth with the right words.

Second, Paul knows he needs boldness, and so he mentions it twice in v.19-20. Fear closes our mouths, and we need boldness and courage to open them. Whether we fear ridicule or rejection or persecution or whatever it may be, we need boldness to open our mouths.

Third, there is a mystery about the gospel. But a mystery is not a secret meant to be kept hidden by closing your mouth; this gospel mystery is meant to be revealed by open mouths! In particular, Paul is thinking about the great shift that occurred when the Spirit came and made the mystery abundantly clear by showing that the gospel was *not just for the Jews, but for everyone* – Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, slaves, free, male, female. If our task was simply to hold on to the gospel for ourselves (think *Jonah*), that'd be one thing. But since the gospel is for everyone, and since our commission is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, we cannot keep our mouths shut!

Fourth, Paul is an ambassador, which is an inherently open-mouthed sort of position, but he is an ambassador *in chains*. His open mouth has cost him big-time! And so he prays that despite the personal suffering that opening his mouth has brought on him, that he would still boldly keep declaring the gospel anyway, like a good ambassador should.

We cannot let ignorance, fear, selfishness, or suffering shut our mouths. And Paul shows us that *prayer*, and in particular, *asking others to pray for us*, is key in keeping our mouths open to share the gospel as we should.

And that word “should” sends us to our next question. We’ve looked at why we might be tempted to close our mouths; but now we’re asking why we ought to open them. Why is there a “should” when it comes to opening your mouth? And I think this is a much better question “Why *should* I open my mouth to share the gospel?” than the question “Do I *have to* open my mouth?”

That second question, I think, reveals some heart problems by assuming that the only reason I’m going to share the gospel is because I’ve found some verse that says I have to. And so God didn’t give us a verse like that. There is no *command* for every *individual* Christian to evangelize and share the gospel. But again, the person who is only concerned with *keeping commands* has a warped view of what it means to have a heart that is captivated and transformed by the glory of God. That’s the approach of the person who buried his talent in the ground, a sort of minimal effort Christianity. “I checked all your boxes, now give me what I earned.” Ugh!

So don't ask what's *required*. Ask what the *right response* to the gospel is. It's much better to look for motivations to stir your heart to want to open your mouth than to look for rules that you must follow. It's better for your heart, *and* it makes you much more effective as an evangelist! This is the difference between giving your wife flowers because you love her and giving her flowers because it's national give-your-wife-flowers day.

So where does that motivation come from? And here I want us to consider Isaiah 6 oh so briefly. Much too briefly! But what happens is that Isaiah sees a vision of the Lord, high and lifted up, covered in splendor and majesty, worshiped by angels crying "Holy, holy, holy!" That by itself should be motivation enough, as the angels demonstrate. But since we are sinners, it takes more. Isaiah sees the Lord and realizes in the light of that glory how very sinful he is, and so he calls down curses upon himself: Woe is me!

And in particular, he says, "I am a man of unclean *lips*!" The angels are praising God and making His glory known, but my mouth is too messed up! The one of God's servants touches his sinful lips with a burning coal from the altar, a clear picture of sacrificial atonement! God declares Isaiah not guilty. His mouth is clean now!

The next thing that happens is that God looks for an ambassador, and Isaiah, *cleansed* Isaiah, *purified* Isaiah, *forgiven* Isaiah, immediately stands up and says "Here I am, send me!" When God cleanses your mouth, you then open your mouth for God. The love of Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as the sacrificial atonement that cleanses you from your sins, that's what motivates you to open your mouth for God!

When open eyes behold the holy glory of God, this is what saved lips say: "Here I am! Send me." And so if you find that your mouth tends to stay closed, you need to look again at the glory of God, and you need to remember the salvation that came from God's altar to cleanse your mouth. Those who have been *saved* by Jesus have all the motivation they need to *speak* for Jesus.

One final question. It's slightly different than asking "Why should I open my mouth?" Now we're asking: "Should I open my mouth *now*, in this situation?" And that's not a question the Bible answers for you. Your Spirit-filled heart needs to answer that question each time it comes up.

But I will say this: If your answer is always “yes”, you’re probably called to be an evangelist, someone whose mouth is always for God! And what a glory that is! But if your answer is always “no”, you should check and make sure that your heart is open. And if you never find yourself in a situation where you even *ask* that question, you should check and make sure your eyes are open!

But because you’ve been wonderfully saved from your sin by the atoning death and powerful resurrection of Jesus, you should desire more chances to answer “yes”. You should be *hoping for*, not *dreading*, opportunities to open your mouth for Jesus.

He who desires to open his mouth for Jesus desires a good work, and so it’s good to pray along with David, “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.” It’s good to pray, as we’ve been praying this year, for open doors to share the gospel. And it’s good to ask for prayer, like Paul, that words may be given to you in opening your mouth to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which you’ve been appointed an ambassador, so that you may speak boldly, as you ought to speak. So let us ask God to open our mouths now,

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*