

Witnessing to Aaron, Brad & Ron

At the end of worship service last Sunday, I mentioned Aaron Rodgers who is the star quarterback of the Green Bay Packers. Not too long ago, Rodgers gave an interview on a podcast hosted by his girlfriend and former NASCAR driver, Danica Patrick. And in that interview, Rodgers commented upon his religious beliefs as follows: ***“I don’t know how you can believe in a God who wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell.”***¹ Now from that statement, it isn’t clear whether he doesn’t believe in God or doesn’t believe in Hell or he doesn’t believe in either one of them.

After learning of Rodger’s statement, I then read an online article about the movie star, Brad Pitt, which shed some light upon his religious views. This article stated: ***“[Brad Pitt] has said in the past that he was raised by a devout Baptist family in Missouri but ‘called myself agnostic’ and then atheist as a young actor. Then he says, ‘I found myself coming back around to just belief in—I hate to use the word spirituality, but just a belief in that we’re all connected.’ He added, ‘I cling to religion.’”***² Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who “cling to religion” or some vague form of “spirituality,” but will end up in that same very real hell that Aaron Rodgers believes does not exist.

And in that same article, it mentioned another celebrity whose religious views have made news lately. And this was none other than the son of President Ronald Reagan—who simply goes by the abbreviated “Ron” Reagan. Now, his views are not as wishy-washy as Aaron Rodgers or Brad Pitt. He does not attempt to disguise where he stands on the matter of God at all. In fact, Ron Reagan wanted to proclaim his views to the world so he made a commercial for the *Freedom from Religion Foundation*, which is a group that promotes atheism. And that commercial aired during one of the recent Democratic Party presidential debates—which, when you think about it—is probably an appropriate and receptive forum to air such a commercial. And in this commercial, Ron Reagan stated: ***“I’m alarmed by the intrusions of religion into our secular government.”*** You see he does not want our government leaders to be guided by Christian values. In fact, he hates any religious views that insist upon the existence of God because he does not believe in God. And so, Ron Reagan ended the commercial in a way that may have been pleasing to many who were attracted to viewing this particular presidential debate. He concluded by saying quite bluntly: ***“Ron Reagan. Lifelong atheist. Not afraid of burning in hell.”***³ I am sure this would have brought a “thumbs-up” from Aaron Rodgers if he happened to be watching.

Now, if you were to discuss your faith with Aaron Rodgers, Brad Pitt or Ron Reagan, what would you say to them? What reasons would you give as to why they need Jesus Christ as their Savior? How

would you even begin that conversation? Well, I can tell you one way not to start the conversation, and that's the way that I so often (quite wrongfully) feel an urge to do. My initial urge (which I am still working on suppressing) is to introduce people like Rodgers to another sport—baseball for example—by taking a bat and cracking him over his football helmet; or for Mr. Pitt, to simply pull out that red carpet from under his feet as he accepts one of his Hollywood awards. Or, for Ron Reagan . . . well, I just don't want to say what my very un-Christian initial urge would be to do with people like him. But, we are not here to learn how to cultivate our un-Christianlike rage. Rather, we are here to learn how to harness our energy in such a way that serves Jesus. And He surely does not want us to swing bats, pull out rugs or take any other aggressive actions against people like this. On the contrary, we are to actively and graciously witness to them and to pray for them.⁴

This morning, I would like for you to think about how we should go about doing exactly that—proclaiming the Gospel to a world that either hates Christ or treats Him as being wholly irrelevant—and certainly hates those who spread His Gospel. Last Sunday as you were leaving, I passed out a handout that outlines some very basic scriptures that help us in witnessing to others. And I have again included that with your bulletins this morning. So let's take a look at that handout to help remind us of what Christians believe, and to give us a logical sequence of arguments that inform people as to why they need to have a relationship with God. In fact, these verses form a framework that explains to them why Jesus is the MOST relevant thing in life.

First of all, look at the Cross of Christ in your handout. At the top of the Cross and on the supporting beams on the left and the right, as well as at the foot of the Cross, you will see bible verses. Now I don't know about you, but it always helps me to visualize something when memorizing bible verses—particularly in remembering the book, chapter and verse in which they appear. And this layout on the Cross can help you because there are only seven verses that we need to know that can assist you in witnessing to others. And that's not really a lot of bible citations to remember. Look, you probably have a dozen or more telephone numbers in your head of family members, friends, work numbers, the doctor and so forth. So remembering the citations for just seven verses is well within our capabilities. And hey—these verses happen to come from only four books in the New Testament—1 Peter, Romans, John and Luke.

So let's start at the head of the Cross where you'll find a reference to **1 Peter 3:15**. (That's easy to remember because everyone knows John 3:16—this one is just one less "**3:15**".) This is what it says: **"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."** (NIV) That verse is first because it equips us with

the right attitude in sharing God's Word to others. If someone approached you and asked why you are a Christian, it isn't enough to say, "***Because I believe in Jesus.***" If someone asks you that question, they probably already assume that you believe in Jesus, otherwise they would never approach you to give an answer in the first place. So what we need to do is to give them reasons why your hope of salvation lies in Jesus. That's what **1 Peter 3:15** is saying. And you don't give them reasons by swinging a baseball bat at them like I sometimes feel like doing—that's why Peter directs us to tell them your reasoning with "***gentleness and respect.***" While you may not win them over on the first conversation, you'll at least leave the door open to witness to them in the future if your words and demeanor are gracious and respectful. On the other hand, when you witness to someone—know this: Somebody is going to be offended. Some of them are going to shout angrily at you, maybe even spit on you, or slap you. But exercising gentleness and respect doesn't mean watering-down the Gospel. Give it to them straight and don't dilute God's Word. And that's why memorizing appropriate bible verses can keep you anchored in doing that. So, how do you start off in giving them good reasons that they need Jesus as their Savior?

Well, that's the thing—so many people don't even know that they need a Savior. As far as they are concerned, they're "***good***" people and if they were to die at most any time, surely God would be good to them. That's where that horizontal beam on the Cross comes into play. And starting with the left arm of the Cross, we find two crucial verses from Paul's letter to the Romans. And their chapter and verse citations are really easy to learn. The first verse is **Romans 3:23**, and the second one is similar to the first. Just double the 3, and what do you get?—you get 6 for the chapter, and it's the same verse number of 23. So, there you have it: Romans 3:**23** and Romans 6:**23**—it's so easy. And these two verses alert people to the fact that they really aren't "***good***" after all. In fact, they (along with you and me) are ***down-right sinful***. That's what **Romans 3:23** tells us: "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" (NIV) And then **Romans 6:23** informs us of the awful consequences of a sin-filled life. Those consequences come in the form of awful, pain-filled wages when it says, "**The wages of sin is death.**"

Ray Comfort in his ministry helps people to see this by walking up to them and engaging in a conversation as to whether or not they think they are headed to heaven or hell. He often will do this on college campuses with young people. The person will typically say that they are going to heaven because "***they are just as good as the next guy.***" So Ray Comfort will ask them if they keep the Ten Commandments. "***Oh yes!***" they'll say, "***I never break any of those.***" Then he'll ask them if they have ever told a lie. Most will admit to having told at least a "***white lie.***" "***So what do you call someone who tells lies,***" he'll ask. "***A liar,***" they'll answer. "***Have you ever stolen anything that was not yours?***" he will ask. "***Yes, I have—but only small things like supplies from work,***" they might respond. "***What do***

you call someone who does that?” he will ask. “A thief,” they respond. Comfort will continue: “Have you ever murdered anybody?” “No way!—I never killed anybody,” is the standard answer. Then Ray Comfort will ask them if they are familiar with Matthew 5:21-22 which says if you are really angry at someone, then it’s really no different from murder in your mind.⁵ Or, particularly if the person being interviewed is a guy, he will ask if they have ever lusted after a woman or viewed pornography. “Yeah, sure,” is what they’ll answer. Comfort will tell them that, again in Matthew 5, Jesus warns that lusting after a woman is the same thing as committing adultery in your heart.⁶

And then he’ll summarize things this way—he’ll turn to the person and say: ***“So, let me get this straight. Based upon what you just told me—you have broken 4 out of 4 of the Ten Commandments mentioned, without even getting to the other 6 Commandments, and you admit that you are a lying, thieving, adulterous, murderer. If you died today and stood before God, do you think you’d be allowed into Heaven or sent straight to Hell?”*** And then you can almost see the imaginary light bulb turn on above their heads, and they come to realize just how sinful all of us really are and that those wages for sin will actually land them in that awful place called Hell.

Now that’s the bad news that you need to give them. But, we can’t leave them there. We need to move on to those two verses on the right arm of the Cross—the ones from the Gospels of John and Luke. These verses tell them the Good News. And the Good News is that there is a solution to our problem that can pay-off all that sin and redeem us from going to Hell. And that’s where we come to the verse we already know, ***John 3:16***. It tells us of the only One who can rescue us from our hell-bound destination. ***John 3:16*** gives the sinner hope because it assures all of us sinners: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (NIV) Now, so many Christians seem to think that this means that all you have to do is ***believe that Jesus is the Son of God***, and by acknowledging that fact alone brings you salvation. But, if that is all they believe, then they are in no better position than Aaron Rodgers or Brad Pitt. In fact, they are in just as much danger as the atheist, Ron Reagan. Why?

Think about it. How could simply ***acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God—and nothing more—*** ever save anyone. The Bible says that even Satan’s demons even believe in God⁷ and they know all too well that Jesus is His Son.⁸ And yet, none of those demons are going to be saved. So we want to be clear about this when telling anyone about Jesus. Yes, He is the Son of God—100% divine, and also the Son of Man—100% human. And yes, we must believe in Him, and that God gave Him as a sacrifice for our sins. But you need to look beyond John 3:16 to that second verse on the right arm of the Cross because it informs us of something else. That all-important verse is found in **Luke 9:23** and it is

absolutely essential to our salvation. Luke tells us: **“Then He [Jesus] said to them all: “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”** (NIV) In other words, if you want to be a true follower of Jesus—if you want to be saved and escape the fires of hell—then you must do three things.

First, you must **“deny yourself.”** What does that mean? It means rather than putting yourself at the center of your life, you must allow Jesus to turn your world up-side-down, and let Him be the center. Stop living for yourself. Start living for Him.

Second, you must **“take up your cross.”** How do you go about doing that? Well, let’s give this a little historical context. In Jesus’ time, the cross was a symbol of death and shame. The world hated anyone who carried a cross. If you carried a cross, then in the eyes of the world, you were carrying the mark of a criminal and they wanted to kill you for it. So when Jesus tells us to “take up our crosses,” He is emphasizing that being a true Christian will come with a terrible price—because in the eyes of the world, you will be no better than a criminal and the world will surely hate you for your commitment to Christ. Jesus is trying to tell us, **“Don’t even bother thinking about being my followers if you can’t carry your cross.”** That’s why learning these Bible verses, and many other passages of Scripture is so important. Spreading God’s Word is part of carrying your cross. So many in the world do not want to hear those words. And yet Jesus tells us: **“If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”** Luke 9:26 (NIV)

The third thing Luke 9:23 teaches us is that after we deny ourselves and take up our crosses, we can’t just stand there and do nothing. We must **“follow Him.”** And we follow Jesus, by following His commandments. Jesus boiled all of the commandments down to the **Two Greatest Commandments** when He said: ³⁷ **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** ³⁸ **This is the first and greatest commandment.** ³⁹ **And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰ **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”** Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV) A lot of Christians stop witnessing at **John 3:16**, but they need to start there and follow through with **Luke 9:23**.

Now finally, let’s look at the foot of the Cross on your handout, because there you have the two final verses that you need to know. Your witness to anyone cannot be complete unless they grasp what these two verses mean for them. The reason for that is this. Once a person comes to the understanding that they are not so **“good”** after all—once they realize that their lives are stained with sin, and that nobody’s getting into Heaven carrying all the filth that sin entails—they will want to have some

assurance that believing and trusting in Jesus can make all the difference in their prospects for salvation. What is it that is so unique about Jesus that makes Him the only One who can remedy our sinful state? How can we be sure that He took on all those wages for our sins—those wages for eternal death that we so richly deserve? That’s what these last two verses explain.

The first verse is **1 Peter 2:24**.⁹ 1 Peter 2:24 really answers any questions about the uniqueness of Christ as well as any other scripture does because this is what it says: **“Christ Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by His wounds that you have been healed.”** (TEV) You see that is the answer—**THE CROSS OF CHRIST IS THE ANSWER**. Jesus carried your sins and mine to the Cross, and paid for them with His suffering, pain and death. No one else could take on all that enormous mass of sin—nobody but the Son of God. Yes, Jesus died so that you might live! And to learn how to take advantage of that greatest of all sacrifices, let’s take a look at the last verse at the very bottom of the Cross in your handouts. It is **Romans 10:9**, which proclaims: **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”** (NLT2) Those who deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him do exactly that. And yet, what does it mean to **“confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord”**? It means to proclaim openly that you know that **Jesus is God**—and as such, **He is your Lord and Savior**.

And why is it important to **“believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead”**? Because without the Resurrection—the **bodily** resurrection of Jesus Christ—there would be no evidence of Jesus’ power over death. There would be no evidence that Jesus’ sacrifice was truly accepted by God as an atonement for our sins. If there were no Resurrection, then we, as Christians, would be the most pitiful of peoples. For as Paul remarked: ¹⁹ **“If being a Christian is of value to us only now in this life, we are the most miserable of creatures.”** ²⁰ **But the fact is that Christ did actually rise from the dead and has become the first of millions who will come back to life again someday.** ²¹ **Death came into the world because of what one man (Adam) did, and it is because of what this other man (Christ) has done that now there is the resurrection from the dead.** ²² **Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, being members of his sinful race, and wherever there is sin, death results. BUT ALL WHO ARE RELATED TO CHRIST WILL RISE AGAIN.”** 1 Corinthians 15:19-22 (TLB)

That is our message and the Cross is our witness. Study these seven verses—it won’t take you long to memorize them. And allow the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in your faith, and to guide you in witnessing to others—and yes—to enable you to give an answer to everyone who asks for a reason of the hope that you have in Jesus Christ. Who knows what **“Aaron Rodgers,” “Brad Pitt”** or **“Ron Reagan”** you might bring to Jesus Christ! Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
February 2, 2020
Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor
©2020 All Rights Reserved

¹ Amanda Casanova, "NFL Quarterback Aaron Rodgers Questions How Anyone Could Believe in God," ChristianHeadlines.com (January 22, 2020).

² Jim Denison, "Out Post-Christian Culture," *Denison Forum on Truth and Culture* (January 24, 2020) www.christianheadlines.com.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Matthew 5:44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (NIV)

⁵ Matthew 5:21-22 ²¹ "Under the laws of Moses the rule was, 'If you murder, you must die.' ²² But I have added to that rule and tell you that if you are only *angry*, even in your own home, you are in danger of judgment! If you call your friend an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse him, you are in danger of the fires of hell. (TLB)

⁶ Matthew 5:27 ²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (NIV)

⁷ James 2:19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. (NLT2)

⁸ Matthew 8:28-29 ²⁸ When [Jesus] arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (NIV)

⁹ The way that I happen to remember the chapter and verse for 1 Peter 2:24 is a little embarrassing. I used to be a NASCAR fan back in the late 90's and early 2000's and for some reason 1 Peter 2:24 sticks in my head because "2" was Rusty Wallace's car number, and "24" was Jeff Gordon's car number—well, all I can say is that it works for me. I hope that you have a more biblically oriented memory tool!