

# “When Sharing the Gospel”

*Acts 13:14-52*

In the book of Acts, not surprisingly, there are numerous accounts of Peter, Paul and others sharing the gospel. Which makes sense since Acts is the Acts of the apostles whom God used to start and build His church. While there are similarities in the accounts none of them are identical. The Bible doesn't have a 'this-is-exactly-how-you-share-Jesus-with-the-lost' formula. For which we should be thankful because all of us are different and God can and will use all of us in our unique abilities and spiritual gifts along with our personal life experiences to tell others about Jesus a little bit differently than the rest of us. And that's perfectly fine.

Even in saying that, all of us I'm sure would like to be a little bit better and a little more equipped to share Jesus with others. Because it is something we know we should do more often and we want to do it well.

When we come across gospel presentations in Acts (and elsewhere) they are helpful for us in hearing another example of how its done. Since all Scripture is God breathed and is designed to equip us for every good work, lets learn here in Acts 13 how we can be a little better equipped to do the good work of sharing Jesus with others.

Last week in 13:1-14 we read how Paul led Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul (governor) of the island of Cyprus to faith in Jesus. From Cyprus they sailed north to Perga and then further inland to another Antioch, Pisidian Antioch.

Last week we suggested that they went to Cyprus first because Barnabas was from Cyprus and it seemed like a good place to start. Makes sense, so they had somewhat of a plan. But why go north inland to Pisidian Antioch? Here's something we can put in our evangelistic tool belt as we look to share Jesus with others.

## **While We Must Always 'Be Ready', Don't Rule out Planning and God's Leading** **(13:14-15)**

Hopefully none of us believes missionaries are sent to various countries by blindfolding them and then have them throw a dart at a map! God speaks to the heart about a passion to reach a people group and they pray and plan for how best to do that. Sometimes that plan and God's leading involves small rural areas and other times it involves large cities with a vast population.

If we've noticed in the New Testament, Paul often targeted larger cities. Because Paul's methodology involved starting with the Jew first, he went where there were larger populations of Jews and they would have a synagogue. We'll come back to that part of his method in a few minutes. Pisidian Antioch was a larger city with many Jews and it was on one of the 400 series highways of the Roman empire. Paul used the main roads a lot. But Pisidian Antioch is still quite a ways from Cyprus (700+ km). Is there another possible reason for going there? When we're praying and planning to share the gospel,

***Watch for 'divine' opportunities (v.14)***

We don't know what led Paul and Barnabas to share Jesus with the Roman governor of the island [remember, Sergius Paulus was the Pontius Pilate of Cyprus] other than God of course. The Romans were good historians and we have a lot of information available to us. One piece of information that I don't think is a coincidence, is that historical records tell us Sergius Paulus' family was one of the wealthiest families in Pisidian Antioch. Archaeologist Stephen Mitchell wrote in his book Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor: The Celts and the Impact of Roman Rule,

*We can hardly avoid the conclusion that the proconsul himself suggested to Paul that he make Antioch his next port of call, no doubt providing him with letters of introduction to aid his passage on his stay.*

Very plausible. God leads Barnabas and Paul to Cyprus because Barnabas was from there. While there the governor invites them to come see him. He accepts Christ. He's a man of influence. 'Where you heading next Paul?' 'We're not sure yet.' 'I can get you safely to my home in Pisidian Antioch. Lots of Jews there and synagogues. I can give you reference and I know some good B&B's there! And there's this really good pizza place ...

Planning and praying for God's leading are always wise moves. Even if its as small as planning to go to see a friend or relative with the prayer that God might lead us to share Jesus. When we pray we'll be more sensitive to seeing God's hand in it; the God-instances He opened up and be ready to share Jesus.

As we said earlier, Paul's usual plan was to find a local synagogue and take advantage of his Pharisaic background and credentials as Gamaliel's student, as well as his prominent testimony. Paul

### ***Used the points of connection God had given him***

As I mentioned earlier Paul used his Jewish rabbi and educated background to create gospel opportunities. It was the custom of the day if you were visiting a synagogue and you were a person of influence or education you would be asked if you wanted to speak on the Scripture passage just read on the Sabbath. Paul used this connection many times. He also used his Roman citizenship sometimes to make a gospel connection. In 1 Cor. 9:20 Paul shared his approach to evangelism:

*<sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.*

We can connect with people through the many roles we have, shared life experiences, sports, hobbies, religious back-grounds, work, geographical or cultural backgrounds – there is no shortage of connecting points that we have with the variety of people we come across with in our day to day lives. Pray that God may help us be sensitive to where He's leading us and that the Spirit would help us use our connecting points with people to produce gospel opportunities. God even uses the negative experiences of life to connect us with people to help them see Jesus. Listen to Paul talk about his imprisonment in Phil. 1:12

*<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of*

*God more courageously and fearlessly.*

I wonder if we have that perspective about the negative things in our life? 'What has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.' If God is sovereign over our lives, He can use the negative in our life for His purposes. A spiritually mature response to trials and pain in life is 'Lord, while I don't welcome this \_\_\_\_\_ in my life right now, help me pray for and see how you might want to use this to advance the gospel.'

Paul, Barnabas and his companions enter a local synagogue. A typical synagogue service of the day would begin with some prayers, a reading from the books of Moses and then one of the prophets. When the host rabbi sees guests he invites them to share on the readings. Paul says 'I could say a few words.' He addresses Jews present and 'you who fear God', any Gentiles in the audience of which there are some. And from Vv.17-41 Luke gives us a summary of Paul's message. Paul's message has some helpful clues for us as we share the gospel with others. Paul's focus is on what God has done in the past to bring Jesus into the world. That's a great reminder when wanting to share the gospel:

## **Start with God and Move to Jesus** **(13:16-41)**

Paul makes a connecting point right away. He begins,

*<sup>17</sup> The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; ...*

Right away Paul uses a point of connection.

### ***He uses a shared life experience (vv.16-17)***

"Our fathers". 'I'm a Jew like you. We share the same background. Abraham, Moses, the exodus, the wilderness, the conquest of the land, the prophets ... We share the same history and the same religious background.' Connecting points helps us identify with each other. There's a mutual understanding. 'You grew up Jewish/Catholic/Muslim or even a general religious home too? Right away there's a 'we have something in common' connection. When we're able to do that it's great. Sometimes that's all you have time for and you plant a seed in people's minds for a future conversation. Their curious. Pray for future opportunities to go further.

Sometimes we can go further. What does Paul do with his connection:

### ***Talks about God's purposes (vv.18-26)***

It's a little easier when you have a shared religious background. But even if you don't and you have a chance to share your own testimony, you talk about your life from God's perspective. As if God has always been directing your life even when you didn't acknowledge it at the time. Notice how Paul constantly puts God as the subject:

God chose our fathers

He led them out of Egypt

He put up with Israel in the wilderness

He destroyed 7 nations

He distributed their land

He gave them judges

They asked for a king and He gave them Saul.

After He removed him He raised up David who is a man after my heart who will do my will.

And then from David's descendants according to His promise God brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus. John the Baptist came before Him as God's Word pointed out. So Paul shows God's purposes for Israel landing at v.26:

*"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.*

All the things that have happened in our life has been to bring us to the point where we hear about Jesus. Our Saviour. Promised by God. We need the message of salvation. Why do we need a Saviour? Why do we need a message of salvation? I'm fine. I'm a good person.

Now Paul talks about who Jesus is and what He did because ...

### ***Jesus meets our greatest needs (vv.27-41)***

Paul explains Jesus lived a sinless life. The Jewish leaders had Him arrested and asked Pilate to have Him crucified. Which He did (this didn't surprise God because He wrote in His Word it would happen!). BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD (v.30). And many people saw Him on the earth after He died.

*"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers<sup>33</sup> he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus*

Okay, why is it good news? A resurrected Jesus who never saw death and now lives can offer us life after we die. How?

<sup>38</sup> *"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.*

<sup>39</sup> *Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.*

Of course, this is the most crucial point. We all need forgiveness of sins and we can't get it through religious practices or good works. You can only get it by believing Jesus can do that for you, because He's the sinless son of God. People often question this or try to justify themselves. But Paul also adds a warning in v.40

<sup>40</sup> *Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:* <sup>41</sup> *" 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'"*

All along Paul has backed up what he has said

### ***With Scripture (vv.33-41)***

'I'm not making this up, look it up for yourself.' Point people to the Word. Invite them to see it for themselves. Trust God's Word to do the convicting and convincing work it can do. And it will. Here he quotes Hab. 1:5 when God answered Habakkuk's question about sinful people. God says, they will perish for their sins. Ultimately if you get this far this will need to be addressed. What if we don't want Jesus in our life? Then God gives you what you want – an eternity without God and Jesus which is an eternity of no light and no love and no joy.

And like Paul here, many people need time to think these things through. Some want to hear more. So in vv.42-43 Paul and Barnabas

*As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.<sup>43</sup> When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.*

And God in His grace gives them more opportunities to talk individually throughout the week. Notice they continued telling them about the grace of God. The gospel is a message of grace. All of us have sinned. None of us deserve eternal life. God sent Jesus to die in our place for our sins. We don't have to work for this. Confess your sins and accept Christ. He loves you. He wants you with Him for all eternity. Then what?

## **Trust God for the Results** **(vv.43-52)**

When we've done our part; now let God do His. And the results are always the same:

**Those open to God's Word believe** (vv.42-44, 48-49, 52)

Many Gentiles respond to the good news of God's grace that includes them. Because they were brought up with a false theology that God only accepts you if you're Jewish. No, God accepts you for yourself. He made you. He sent Jesus to die for you. Accept you have sinned, confess that and ask Jesus to forgive you once for all.

And we see God is the one who saves here in v.48:

*<sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

The amazing 2-sided coin of salvation. God chooses, we believe. But not everyone:

**Those opposed to God's Word refuse** (vv.45-47, 50-51)

*The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.<sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.<sup>51</sup> So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.<sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

Pisidian Antioch was a center for Emperor worship. They had a statue of Emperor Augustine and so these leading men and women supported Rome and so when they heard of another message about Jesus as Lord instead of Caesar, they got all wound up. So they ran Paul and his companions out of town. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet and went on to Iconium. Traditionally, Jews shook the dust off their clothes when they returned from spending time with gentiles or in a Gentile country. It was saying 'we want nothing to do with 'unclean gentiles'. So when Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their robes and moving on to another Gentile city, it was saying we want nothing to do with you 'unclean' Jews who reject the message.

As we move through Acts there will be other things we'll learn about sharing the gospel as well. There is no one way to share Jesus with others but there are some things we can learn about

how to connect with people with the prayer that God gives us a gospel opportunity. We all have common connecting points that we can use to relate to people. Many people have questions about God that they would love answered. Yet too many people don't know how much God loves them that He sent His Son Jesus to die for their sins because the only way we can have forgiveness of sins is through faith in Jesus. Too many people are unprepared for and unaware of eternal pain and suffering of rejecting Jesus or even just ignoring Jesus. If Jesus already paid the price for our sins why would I want to try and pay through good works that which has already been paid and for which we can never pay for since we are sinners ourselves.

Thank you Lord for Your Son in whom alone is hope.

**Rom. 10:9** If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

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