

June 28th, 2009 – Set Apart for the Nations

Sermon Application Questions

- 1) Consider those people in your life who cause you trouble. Is there an opportunity to live out or speak the Gospel? How can the group pray for you to establish bridges and take every opportunity to speak the Gospel?
- 2) Can you give examples of different methods you have used to speak the Gospel - either different ways you have done this systematically, or different ways you have done this biographically?
- 3) Consider the different types of people you interact with. For each group, what is the key offensive element of the Gospel? Thus, what must you be certain to share if you are not to distort the Gospel? How might you be tempted to cause unnecessary offense when presenting this truth?
- 4) You have been blessed so that you can be a blessing (and as you are a blessing to others - you are that much more blessed, made happy yourself). Coty said, "You are either going into cross-cultural missions, sending others into cross-cultural missions, mobilizing others as senders and goers into cross-cultural missions – or you are disobedient." Do you agree that the statement is biblical? Which one categorizes you? How can this small group help you to live out this important truth of God's Word?

Sermon Outline

When facing hardship or persecution, we've considered in past weeks the attitude we should have. But now we ask: What should we do when persecuted?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:16-18

Sheep in the midst of wolves will always be attacked

So we must be ready to be attacked.

Jesus then tells us what to do: Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves

How are serpents wise?

They sit back, stay out of the way, avoid trouble if possible
– but if they are attacked, they strike back

How are doves innocent?

They don't hurt anything.

So, if we are to be like both: When attacked, always strike back effectively

But in striking back, don't hurt your opponents –
strike back by blessing them with the Gospel

For that's the purpose of persecution: To give powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel, in word and in deed.

This is what Paul does in Acts 22.

What should we do when persecuted?

1) Use every opportunity to preach the Gospel -

Paul could have been taken away to safety. But he instead thinks:

"I've got a huge crowd of my countrymen focused on me –
this must be a good time to preach!"

When we face suffering, we are tempted to self-pity or stoicism

Say, "Poor me" or grit teeth and get thru it

Instead: Always ask yourself:

What's the opportunity that accompanies this difficulty?

2) Establish bridges to your listeners

Paul goes to great pains to establish bridges with his accusers
In verses 3-5 he says, "I am one of you now, and once I thought and acted just like you are thinking and acting."

This is good to do.

But we must never think that a cultural bridge is all that is necessary.

Paul had as good a cultural bridge with the Jews as any –

and the truths he preaches offend them anyway.

The Gospel is offensive. It will offend.

So bridges are necessary, good, -- but not sufficient

3) Preach the Gospel in the most effective way

But rarely is the best presentation of the Gospel the same for 2 diff't people

For example: for some people, it is best to speak the Gospel systematically

In other cases, it is best to make those points through telling your biography

The point is not to testify about yourself

The point is to use your biography to communicate the points of the Gospel

Paul: in Athens, ch 17, he teaches systematically

Here in ch 22, he uses his biography.

Just so with us: When facing difficulties, consider how you will communicate the Gospel

Don't simply turn to a tract, or a canned presentation:

Keep the outline of the Gospel in your head

Listen, learn about the person,

Speak the Gospel in the midst of conversation,

in a way that flows out of the bridges between you

That's what Paul does

4) Preach the Gospel fully –

God weaves the truths of the Gospel – God, Man, Christ, Response – into his telling the story of his life:

GOD – only says v14 "God of our fathers;" does not emphasize this point,

Since he is speaking to Jews for whom basics about God should be widely known.

MAN – v16 Paul needed his sins washed away, even tho v3 he was taught the law and was zealous for the law

Implication: (and where Paul must be going):

These Jews who are trusting in their obedience to law are also sinful, they need washing too

CHRIST - v7-8 He is risen!

Thus he lived on earth. He died on the cross, as all present know.

God raised Him from the dead.

RESPONSE – v16 his sins can be washed away by calling on Jesus' name!

Now, as in several other talks in Acts, Paul is cut off before he can finish

What would Paul have said next? Surely:

"you too come to Christ!"

But he never gets to the main point he wanted to make

Why?

What is it in his speech that leads to the riot breaking out again?

V21: Jesus saying to Paul “Go, for I will send you far away to the nations”

They then respond, “Away with such a fellow from the earth. For he should not be allowed to live.”

Note:

Paul had made several other potentially offensive points

But none of those provoke any response that Luke records

Paul does not want to offend his listeners –

But he wants to preach the Gospel fully

And he sees that their biggest blind spot, their greatest sin, is spiritual pride

The Gospel involves ALL NATIONS

And so Paul brings out that point – though he knows it will offend

The Gospel Must Involve the Nations

To help us see the centrality of this point, turn briefly to Eph 3:4-6

Note that the involvement of the Gentiles/Nations is so imp't, so central,

Paul calls it “The mystery of Christ”

This Gospel is an eternal Gospel – as we read in Rev 14:6 –

that is, extensive across all time

And the Gospel is an extensive Gospel –

extending to every tribe and tongue and people and nation

It MUST extend to every nation

But what did these opponents of Paul think?

They would agree God has chosen His people eternally

But they thought THEY were His people, His ONLY people

Didn't want anyone else to join their party

So, they act like Jonah in OT, who is angry enough to die when the people of Nineveh repent, and God relents from destroying them.

Here in Acts,

these new Jonahs listen calmly to Paul say things they think aren't true

But when he says GOD wants to bring ALL NATIONS to Himself

They are deeply offended, lash out

SO: Preach the Gospel fully must imply: Preach the offending parts of the Gospel, those parts that are offensive to person listening

If you leave that out – distorting Gospel

And we must let people know that the Gospel is for all men – even those you hate

As we said when looking at Acts 15

The Gospel in its very essence is cross-cultural

Salvation by grace alone thru faith alone

cannot be limited to those who do certain tasks or act certain ways

So the Gospel must involve all nations

This is so imp't that Paul COULD NOT LEAVE IT OUT

He could have tried to justify doing so

“Let me get them saved, THEN I’ll talk to them about the nations”
But this is central – This IS the “mystery of Christ”

How do YOU live that out?

What is YOUR involvement in spreading a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for joy of ALL peoples?

How is God calling you to be involved? You are either going, sending, mobilizing – or you are disobedient

CONCLUSION

Pride was their central sin of Paul’s opponents

Pride in that they were chosen by God as a people

Pride in religious traditions given by God

Pride in religious status is perhaps the most dangerous sin. For it makes you

Blind to God’s grace

Blind to your purpose: to praise God, to show/tell the Gospel

Blind to your own sin

Friends: Our danger is to think Gospel means for God to bless us – full stop

But Ps 67, Gen 12, Act 20 all show: We are blessed to be a blessing.

Think of the fundamental sin of Paul’s opponents in these terms:

They are thinking:

“It is more blessed to receive God’s blessings – the Law, the temple, the covenants, the feasts - than to give those blessings to others”

Don’t fall into that sin! Believe in Christ, and in God’s undeserved grace

Then: Wake up every day and say to yourself:

“I am in Christ!

“I am chosen by God!

“I am gifted by God!

“I am blessed by God!

“Nothing can separate me from His love!

Say that! See who you are in Christ. You are blessed!

But don’t stop there!

Continue to say

“I am blessed by God – to be a blessing to others
esp to those who hate me

“I am chosen by God – to bring glory to His Name,
to magnify His Name among all peoples

“I am gifted by God – to expand, unify, strengthen, and build up the body of Christ

“Nothing will separate me from God’s love in Christ Jesus –
so I can endure separation

from comfort,

from friendship,

from family,

from possessions,

in order to bless others and glorify God

Say that every day

Pray that every day
Then live that out every day

That's the Gospel
That's your purpose
That's your calling

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