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Acts of the Apostles

Living Praise Presbyterian Church - Home Cell Group Bible Study Feb-Jul 2001



DEVELOPING PEOPLE FOR MISSIONS

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Leading or Misleading?

John the Baptist would never get hired today. No church would touch him. He was a public relations disaster. He “wore clothes made from camel’s hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey” (Mark 1:6). Who would want to look at a guy like that on Sunday?

His message was as rough as his dress: a no-nonsense, bare-fisted challenge to repent because God was on his way.

Didn’t matter to John if you were a Jew, a priest, a Baptist, or all three. What mattered was that you get off your duff and get right with God because he’s coming and he don’t mean maybe.

No, John would never get hired today. His tactics lacked tact. His style wasn’t smooth. He made few friends and lots of enemies, but what do you know? He made hundreds of converts. “All the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River” (Mark 1:5).

Look at that. “All the people of Judea and Jerusalem....” How do you explain such a response? It certainly wasn’t his charisma or clothing. Nor was it his money or position, for he had neither. Then what did he have?

One word. *Holiness*.

John the Baptist set himself apart for one task, to be a voice of Christ. Everything about John centered on his purpose. His dress. His diet. His actions. His demands.

He reminded his hearers of Elijah. And he reminds us of this truth: “There is winsomeness in holiness.” You don’t have to be like the world to have an impact on the world. You don’t have to be like the crowd to change the crowd. You don’t have to lower yourself down to their level to lift them up to your level.

Nor do you have to be weird. You don’t have to wear camel’s hair clothing or eat insects. Holiness doesn’t seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like God.

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life:

Be faithful to your spouse.

Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.

Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.

Be the employee who does the work and doesn’t complain.

Pay your bills on time.

Do your part and enjoy life.

Don’t speak one message and live another.

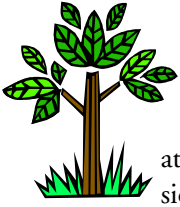
Note the last line of Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, “Do all you can to lead a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you.

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John’s life had not matched his words? What if he’d preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he’d called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John’s life had not matched his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours.

People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

From *A Gentle Thunder* by Max Lucado



Peter has disappeared. We do not know where he is hiding. Luke is ushering Peter from the stage, while Paul steps to the forefront. Peter, the apostle to the Jews, has played his part well and prepared the way for Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas have completed their mission of mercy in Jerusalem on behalf of the church at Antioch (11:29) and have returned to Antioch with John Mark. We will look into Paul's missionary journey - the beginning of the master plan of evangelism.

REFLECTION:

Think of someone you know who shares the gospel effectively. What qualities do you see in that person?

DISCOVERY:

1. Read Acts 13-14. Antioch was the second great metropolis of the church and the mother of Gentile Christianity. What role did the church of Antioch play in Paul's first missionary journey (13:1-3; 14:26-28)?
2. Review Paul's message in the Synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41). What truths of the gospel are communicated?
3. How does Paul's message show sensitivity to his audience and the context?
4. List the different responses to the gospel (13:7-8, 13, 42-45, 48, 52; 14:1-5) that you see in these passages.
5. How did Paul respond to those who rejected the gospel (13:9-11, 46, 51)?

to those who believed (14:9-10, 21-23)?

6. In this passage the response to the gospel by believers was to be filled with “joy and the Holy Spirit” (13:52). How prevalent is this in the life of our church today?

RESPONSE:

A. In missionary outreach how do churches today compare and/or contrast with those of Antioch?

B. In what relationships and situations do we need to be sensitive when we evangelize today?

C. People today would not offer sacrifices to those who bring the good news of Jesus. However, in what ways are we faced with the temptation to be “god” in another’s life or to take credit for what God has done? How do we help one another when in the midst of such temptations?

D. As you look at these two chapters, what qualities do you see in Paul and Barnabas that made them effective in their ministry? Which of these qualities do you want God to develop in you and make you more effective in communicating the gospel?



Disbelief has peculiar children:

There was a king who left his servant in charge of the castle while he went on a journey. The king had a falcon. The servant had never seen a falcon and so when he saw the king’s falcon, he thought it was a deformed pigeon. Out of compassion for the bird, he clipped its claws and filed its beak so it would look more like a pigeon.

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There was a handsome prince who fell in love with a simple maiden. She wasn’t attractive. She didn’t trust his love. “How would you love me?” She would ask. “I’m not beautiful. I’m not rich. I’m not a royalty.”

“I just love you,” he would answer.

He asked her to marry him. She still didn’t trust his love, but she agreed. “I will marry you. I will clean your house and prepare your meals and bear you children.”

“But I don’t want to marry you for what you will do for me. I want to marry you because I love you.”

And so they married. And so she cleaned his house and fixed his meals and bore his children. And he loved her. But she left him. She told a friend she didn’t think he loved her anymore.

From *A Gentle Thuder* by Max Lucado



Topical Study: Prayer

And when they had fasted and prayed...they sent them away (13:3)

Prayer plays an important part in this story. The Antioch church prayed for the missionaries (13:3), and the missionsries prayed for the newly organized churches (14:23). Throughout the book of Acts, indeed throughout the entire Bible, we see great things brought about by prayer. Many Christians in practice doubt the efficacy of prayer because to them prayer is more a habit than it is a force. They pray as a religious duty and not as a means to an end. The Bible clearly teaches that God means our prayer to have an answer, so if our prayers are not being answered it is because we are not praying aright. Someone has said, "there is nothing we more need to study and practice than the art of praying aright. The powers of the eternal world are placed at the disposal of believing prayer." It is a great thing to know how to speak to men so as to move them to action, but it is a greater thing to know how to speak to God and watch Him respond.

God has given promises regarding prayer that are staggering because they are so great. See, for example, John 14:14-15; 16:23. But notice the conditions that must be fulfilled before we can claim such promises. Here are seven conditions, among others, of answered prayers:

1. *Forsaken sin* (Ps 66:18). Herein lies a very simple explanation why many of pray and are not heard. In our heart we must abhor sin. Read Psalm 51 to learn what contriteness for sin is.

2. *A forgiving spirit* (Mark 11:25-26). Many fail to receive answers to prayer because they have an unforgiving spirit toward someone.

3. *A spiritual motive* (James 4:3). The chief motive in prayer should be that God may be glorified in the answer, not that we may be gratified or benefited. Thousands of requests, perfectly proper in themselves, remain ungranted because the motive is selfish.

4. *Obedience* (1 John 3:22). "Here we find one of the greatest secrets of prevailing prayer. If we listen to God's commandments God will listen to our prayers. If we do as He bids us in His word, He will do as we ask Him in our prayers. If we do what pleases Him, He will do what pleases us."

5. *Faith* (Mark 11:24; Matt 21:22). This is not general faith in God or Christ but a specific faith that

the very things we are asking will be given. We are to have an unwavering expectation of answered prayer.

6. *Praying according to God's will* (1 John 5:14).

The question here is, of course, how to know God's will. God withholds many things from us, but that which may be known of His will is learned through knowing *Him* and the way He works more intimately. This comes by spiritual eyes and ears that are alert to what He discloses in a) the Bible, b) circumstances, and c) the still small voice of His Spirit. Knowing that we can and do pray amiss at times concerning God's will, we should always have an attitude of heart that says, "Thy will, not mine, be done." Such a heart readily accepts answers from God like "No" and "Wait."

7. *Praying in Jesus' name* (John 16:23). All blessings come to us through Jesus Christ. Torrey uses the illustration of a check drawn on a bank. A check made out to me is good for the amount written if the prayer has that much money in the bank. It matters not whether or not I have any money in my bank account. "Jesus Christ has given to believers in Him the right to put His name upon their checks. We have nothing in the bank of heaven, no claim upon it. He has unlimited credit there."

Only glimpses of this great importance of prayer could the apostles get before Pentecost. But the Spirit coming and filling at Pentecost elevated prayer to its vital and all-commanding position in the gospel of Christ. The call now of prayer to every saint is the Spirit's loudest and most exigent call. Sainthood's piety is made, refined, perfected, by prayer. The gospel moves with slow and timid pace when the saints are not at their prayers early and late and long.

A Final Thought:

Read again 13:49-52 and account for the joy of the disciples in view of all that was transpiring at that time.

Sources:

Phyllis J. Le Peau. **Acts.**

Irving Jensen. **Acts - A Self-study Guide.**

Max Lucado. **A Gentle Thunder.**