

Principles of Witnessing

Acts 14.8-20

December 10

Humans are incurably worshipers. All people worship someone or something. As one theologian wrote, “The human heart is an idol factory.” Paul proclaimed the good news in the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.??). His sermon contains several quotations from the OT. Our focal passage, Acts 14.8-20, details a sermon Paul preached to God-fearers and gentiles without a background in the Old Testament Scriptures (God-fearers). How do you communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to people whose background is pagan worship and have no concept of the biblical God or Scripture? In the United States, believers increasingly must witness to people with no background in any religion.

What does this encounter of Paul with people from a pagan background teach us about sharing the good news?

First, sharing the good news must become a habitual pattern in our lives (Acts 17.7). First, Paul and Barnabas developed a missional *strategy* of preaching first to people most likely to be receptive. Paul and Barnabas preached to an audience prepared by the OT in the synagogue. The synagogue attendees affirmed many beliefs in common with Christians: belief in one God, affirmation of the revelation contained in the OT, and requirement to live by the standards of the one God. Second, the missionaries practiced an inclusive *objective* of sharing Jesus with diverse ethnic groups, namely, Jews and Gentiles. Third, Paul and Barnabas adopted a *practice* of forming a habit of sharing Jesus (v. 7).

Second, sharing the good news necessitates understanding what God is doing in an individual (Acts 14.8-10). Both Peter and Paul healed an individual unable to walk. While most people ignored beggars, Peter looked at the lame man “intently” (Acts 3.4). Likewise, Paul observed the lame man listening to the sermon and “looked intently” (same Greek word as Acts 3.4) and observed that the man had faith. Paul commanded the man to stand up! Believers need to develop a Spirit-provided sensitivity to see how God may be working in an individual’s life.

Third, believers should be prepared for the gospel to be misunderstood (Acts 14.11-13). Residents of Lystra mistook Paul and Barnabas for the pagan gods Zeus and Hermes. The history of the city likely accounts for this misunderstanding. A local legend recounted the story of Zeus and Hermes assuming human form and disguising themselves and seeking lodging. An elderly couple welcomed the gods; consequently, the gods rewarded the couple by turning their humble home into a temple and making the couple priests. Since the Zeus and Hermes destroyed those who did not receive them, the residents of Lystra wanted to get it right this time. The likelihood of misunderstanding mandates clarity and faithfulness to share the gospel repeatedly with unresponsive individuals.

Fourth, believers should begin the gospel message at the life-stage of the unbelievers to whom we seek to share the good news (Acts 14.14-18). Because the city residents had no understanding of God’s Word, Paul began his sermon with the concepts of God and creation. Paul followed a similar methodology in addressing the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17. Paul detailed the following characteristics of God. There is only one God. He is Living. God created heaven, earth, and everything. God is Lord of history (in the past) and good (He gives good gifts). Further, Paul challenged his listeners to respond – “turn from worthless things to the living God (v. 15). The Greek term translated “turn from” in the CSB functions as one of the primary terms by which Luke described conversion involving turning from sin (repentance) and turning to God. Paul’s use of the term in 1 Thessalonians 1.9 is helpful – “to turn from idols (repentance) to serve the living and true God (faith).

Fifth, believers should recognize the possibility of rejection of the good news (Acts 14.19-20;). Some Jewish traveling merchants or individuals that followed the missionary team stoned Paul. The persecutors thought Paul dead. Paul’s short time in Lystra did produce fruit. Timothy, Paul’s ministry associate, was from Lystra (Acts 16.1).