

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R₂L – Resolved to Live: Proclaiming Jesus

Acts 13:14-44

13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. 14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

They are everywhere, you know. Everywhere you go, in every conceivable arena; there is not place where they are not found. They are in your neighborhoods, in your classrooms; they are working by your side; they are found in the private sector and they work for the government. You pass by them in Wal-mart, drive past them on the roads and even eat next to them restaurants. They are even found in great numbers in the church. Yes, the church! Of whom am I speaking? I am speaking of people who are religious, but really do not know Jesus Christ; those who go to church, who strive to be moral and upright, but those who, as the apostle Paul described to Timothy, have a form of godliness, yet they deny its power; the power of God to transform, convert, regenerate and simply change their hearts and minds toward living in light of the pure grace of God.

Beloved, there is nothing more dangerous than being a religious person; one who knows *about* God, knows *about* the Bible, knows *about* Jesus, yet ultimately is lost; not yet having experienced the wonder and realities of being radically transformed by the truth of Christ in you, the hope of glory.

And, as I said before, the world, indeed your world is filled with countless religious people. It has always been like this, for even in the book of Acts, some of the cruelest, meanest, most blood thirsty men were the religious, the Priests, the captain of the temple, even Saul himself. These people knew about God and the Scriptures. These people attended the synagogues and participated in their “worship” services. Yet these were the ones responsible for all the threatenings, beatings, imprisonings of those who belonged to the early church.

As history attests, some of the most hideous crimes against humanity have been done in the name of “religion” and many by those who would call themselves “Christian”. What does it mean to be “religious” yet unsaved; to be a “church-goer” yet lost? The most fundamental characteristic of a religious but lost person is this; he convinces himself and others that he is more than he really is spiritually speaking. In the book of Acts, the religious people were those who were jealous, angry, and embittered as people were coming to know Jesus because as they were entering into the life changing experience of salvation in Christ, the religious people were losing their influence, and their control. The key characteristic of a religious yet unsaved person is that they ultimately believe that they are something, something special, some more, something better; that somehow God has seen their goodness and determination and has, because of such things, decided to bless such a special person.

And even though religious, people such as this ultimately reject Christ in one degree or another because to fully receive Christ requires a person to admit his nothingness; to admit his sinfulness, to admit that unless God is gracious and benevolent and kind, they will remain nothing. Religious people have convinced themselves that they are more than they really are. Is this not true? Do we not all have a natural inclination to be something special? We want to be seen as responsible, as someone who can take care of ourselves, and thus live for ourselves. What we forget is that in spiritual matters, until we recognize ourselves as nothing but sinners, those who fail God’s moral standards to one degree or another, and thus humbly and desperately embrace Christ and what He did for us on the cross; being our substitute, taking our punishment

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for failing God and falling short of His glorious perfection; believing that by embracing Christ, He also graciously changes our hearts and implants in us a true knowledge of God's holiness and our sinfulness as well as a longing to be more and more like Christ, we will in no way be acceptable to God.

As C.S. Lewis once noted, *"...In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that--and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison--you cannot know God at all."* Until we acknowledge that Jesus Christ did not come to make bad people good and good people better, but rather He came to make those who were spiritual dead to God, alive to and in God, we may be the most religious, yet also the most lost people on the face of the earth.

Why do I share all this? I share this because as we come to our next section here in Acts 13, we see Paul resolved to proclaim Jesus. And as this first missionary journey begins to go into full swing, Paul's resolve to proclaim Jesus begins with addressing religious people. He goes to the synagogues and speaks of Christ.

Let us remember that it was Jesus who said to His disciples, "I will make you fishers of men." And this is what Jesus did, He taught them to fish, to share the gospel. As time went on however, the church has forgotten how to fish. For some, fishing became the task of the professional spiritual anglers. For others, personal fishing for men ("soul winning") was replaced by marketing and programs. Do not forget that the mission of the church is fishing for men. Jesus said, "You shall be My witnesses," Let us not forget that we are still here on earth for this purpose, to tell people about Jesus. Is this your resolve? It is our privilege to reach people for Jesus one by one. Sadly, the church today is filled with numbers of people who do not fish, either because they do not know how or they have been sidelined by the pursuit of other things. Jobs; school, projects, sports, relationships, entertainment and other things have become the priority for many and these things. What is needful is fishing lessons along with a resolve to go out and fish!

Let me ask you a question, do you know how to evangelize lost people? Do you know how to lead someone through the saving knowledge of the person and work of Jesus? How many "fish" have you caught in the last month or year or even five years? I know that salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9) and that we do not "catch" unsaved people apart from the sovereign effectual working of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. However, I promise you this, will we "catch" anyone if we do not have our fishing poles out in the water where the fish are!

This morning I would have you see Paul as an example of an expert fisherman. And by watching him, we learn how to fish for men. Remember that the very reason Paul and Barnabas left the comforts and comradere of their sending church in Antioch was to see people come to truly know and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior. In our text this morning, we learn some simple, yet valuable methods of how to be fishers of men; those resolved to live a life proclaiming Jesus. In our text we have three methods essential to proclaiming Jesus. These are the "musts" and the non-negotiables of effective evangelism – that task and goal of making disciples or followers of Jesus Christ. We are going to look at three simple methods of evangelism, or three means of being effective fishers of men, are these; 1) go; 2) tell; 3) lead. To state it more fully, we must: 1) Go to where the people are; 2) Tell them about Jesus; 3) Lead them to make a response.

As you are accustomed to, I will be breaking this up into two messages. For one reason, there are a lot of verses here to cover, but additionally because of the very importance that we grasp not only what Paul is doing here, but also of adopting and incorporating these attitudes and actions into our daily routines.

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I. Go to where the people are (14-15).

We see this first method of effective evangelism revealed in verse 14 where we read, ***“But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.”***

Perga was a coastal city in Asia Minor, on the southern side of modern day Turkey. This is where Paul and his companions first landed after their ministry on the island of Cyprus. From there, they went to Pisidian, Antioch (not to be confused with the Antioch, Syria from the beginning of chapter 13). We might wonder why nothing is said of Paul preaching in Perga. Some scholars believe that Paul contracted malaria and was forced to retreat to the higher, cooler climate of Pisidian Antioch. Is there any biblical evidence for Paul being ill? Well, it was not long after this time that Paul wrote a letter, which we know as “Galatians,” to the people of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, all of which were in Roman province of Galatia. Listen to what Paul wrote in Galatians 4:13-14,

13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.

It would seem that when Paul first came to Galatia that he was a sick man. This means that when he preached the sermon we are about to look at here in Acts 13, Paul was ill. How ill was he? Of this we are not certain. The oldest known tradition of Paul’s thorn in the flesh says he suffered from excruciating headaches. One Bible commentator (Barclay) explains, “The most likely explanation is that he was the victim of a virulent recurring malaria fever which haunted the low coastal strip of Asia Minor. A traveler says that the headache characteristic of this malaria was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead; another likens it to a dentist’s drill boring through a man’s temple. It is most likely that this malaria attacked Paul in low-lying Pamphylia and that he had to make for the plateau country to shake it off.” Beloved, this man was resolved to live proclaiming Jesus, regardless of how he felt. Oh the excuses we employ not to minister, not to serve, not to worship, not to fellowship and not to be engaged or involved. Paul was resolved to proclaim the gospel. Let us follow his example.

So here we have sickly Paul, headed for Pisidian Antioch, some 100 miles north of Perga on a plateau 3,600 feet above sea level. To get there Paul and Barnabas had to cross the Taurus mountain range, which was regarded as one of the most difficult roads in Asia Minor. It was a road notorious for being filled robbers and thugs. Oh the resolve of Paul, risking the hazards of malaria, rough travel, and robbers for the one simple reason; he was resolved to *go where the people were*. And Pisidian, Antioch offered a strategic location from when to launch the gospel. As Paul arrived in Antioch, we see two things that happened.

First, according to verse 14, ***on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.*** Why would they have gone to the synagogue? We might suggest a number of reasons, but the most simple and obvious is that of our point, that is where the people were. Beloved, just like a fisherman needs fish if he is going fishing; if you are going to do evangelism, you need people. Paul knew that there would be people in the synagogue, the Jewish place of worship and fellowship. And there, the people would be inclined to study the Scriptures. But a second thing happened, first Paul went to the people then...

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Second, God graciously opened the hearts of the people to hear from Paul. Look at verse 15 with me, **After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”**

Can you believe it, they asked Paul to give a word of exhortation! Why did these strangers give Paul such an invitation? Perhaps it was because they knew Paul had been a Pharisee and had been trained in the school of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. If Phil Johnson, one of John MacArthur’s most beloved and trained Elders at Grace Community Church paid us a visit, I promise you, we, who have never met him in person, would ask him to give a word of exhortation. I love how God uses our backgrounds to give us opportunities. He used Paul’s rabbinic training to open doors for doing synagogue evangelism.

I want to remind you that whatever your background, your training, or your experiences, these God has given you as a potential tool for evangelism – for telling others about Jesus. See the potential in what God has given you as a means of reaching others for Jesus. So then, if we would be resolved to live our lives proclaiming Jesus, it begins with going where people are. Sometimes the people may be right in your own living room if you have folks in your home; sometimes the people are at Starbucks or the lunch room. But be where the people are! You cannot “do evangelism” without people. But this leads us to the second method of effective evangelism....

II. Tell them the truth about Jesus (16-37).

I made a big deal at the beginning of this message about “religious” people; those who think of themselves as spiritual but really do not know Jesus personally and relationally. It is interesting to see that the kind of people Paul first goes to are *religious* people. They were not godless pagans and by and large they were not immoral. The truth was that they were committed to being different than their surrounding culture. This is why they were in the synagogue. They were religious but they were also *lost*.

We have a similar situation. We live in the "Bible Belt." We are surrounded with religious people all the time. How many people have you met that has not made some type of religious commitment at one point in his or her life? Very few I imagine. And the question before is us this, how do we reach *religious* people for Jesus? They can be hard to reach because they think they are okay. But the simple answer is to do what Paul did; tell them the truth *about Jesus*. Religion saves no one. The bible is clear that only Jesus saves. And beloved, this is what every religious person needs to know; that Jesus alone saves. I would have you notice what Paul tells these religious people about Jesus. Beginning in verse 16 we read, **Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen...”**

I like how Paul knew his audience; he knew what made these people tick! If we are to be effective in proclaiming Jesus, then we must learn how to read where people are at. Paul was aware of whom he was talking to; to devout Jews and Gentiles who feared the God of Israel. Both groups knew and revered the Hebrew Scriptures and so Paul used the Hebrew Scriptures in his message. Beginning with Israel’s history, notice how clearly he brings all of this to point to Jesus. But not everyone has a grounding in the Old Testament. Once, as Paul was speaking to pagan Gentiles, those who had not understanding of Scripture at all, he started with the creation account. But whether he started with Israel’s history or with the Creation account, he always ended up telling them about Jesus. In other words, you have not done true and effective evangelism until you have told a person about Jesus!

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This is where it gets practical, for the question so many of us ask when talking about evangelism is this; “how do I tell someone about Jesus?” Specifically here we see how Paul told religious people about Jesus. If you just read through his gospel presentation, it takes just about three and a half minutes to read and contains four main points. At no time is there a question as to who Paul’s main subject is. Like a lawyer, Paul appeals to four witnesses to demonstrate the truth that Jesus is Lord and Savior and needs to be received as such. Let us note these four witnesses, remembering that as we speak to people who have religious backgrounds, these may come in handy in telling people about Jesus.

The **first witness** Paul appeals to is that of **Israel’s history**. This is found in verses 16-23 as Paul demonstrates the reality and necessity of Jesus. As we work through these verses, notice how quickly Paul hits the highlights of the Old Testament redemption story, emphasizing God’s initiative in four actions in Israel’s past. Notice the four actions of God in Israel’s history.

1. God chose the patriarchs (the fathers) (17a).

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers...

Israel’s history starts with God Himself. It is God who chose and He chose one man, a pagan man named Abram. God entered into a covenant relationship with Him. It was God who gave Abram a son of promise, Isaac. It was God who gave to Isaac gave two sons, Jacob and Esau, and it was God who chose the younger of the two to receive the blessing. It was God who gave to Jacob twelve sons, and from these twelve sons God establish a nation.

2. God gave Israel land (17b-19).

...and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. 18 For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. 19 When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance — all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

We do not have time to get into great detail concerning these verses, but I wish to simply state them even as Paul did and then to build upon them even as Paul did. But there is an application that I would not have us miss; an important lesson we need to remember regarding how to teach people. Paul’s message may seem rather basic, like an elementary Sunday School lesson, but he is employing a key teaching principle; the taking of people from *where they are* to *where they need to be*; from *what they know* to *what they need to know*. Paul is laying a sure foundation upon which to build. In a moment Paul will say something that will rock their spiritual world and he wants them to be able to look back and know that what he says is truth. He shows them that Christianity isn’t anti-Judaism, for its rooted in Old Testament history. Sometimes we need to show people that Christianity is not anti-people; anti-fun; anti-life. Rather we need to define people and life in Biblical terms. So then, Paul moves his listeners along the timeline of Israel’s history and comes to a third thing God did for Israel...

3. God gave Israel leaders (20-22).

20 After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, ‘I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.’

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Again, quickly Paul notes that God gave Israel leaders. He gave them judges, Samuel the prophet, and Saul the king. Then established a man after His own heart, King David. From here Paul jumps forward some one thousand years in history, taking them from David to the promised descendant of David, revealing the fourth action God did for Israel...

4. God gave Israel the Savior (23).

From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus...

Do not miss how Paul used Israel's history for the purpose of leading his audience to Jesus. All he did was to tell the story of the Scriptures and then link it to Jesus. Can we do this? Just share the story of Scripture and then show how it links to Jesus. Of course, so long as those to whom we are speaking know some biblical history like Paul's audience did. However, there are many around us who do not have much Bible knowledge. Paul could say, "God chose our fathers," and his audience knew who he was talking about. If our audience doesn't know this, what are we to do? Beloved, we may not always be able to begin with Abraham. WE may have to go further back for some. Paul's audience already knew that God is the Creator, that as Creator God deserves to be first and foremost in our lives, that life is not rightly understood or lived without God, and that the Scriptures are His self-revelation to us as well as our guide for life. If the people you are talking to do not know this, we must tell them. I am convinced that much of our evangelism today needs to start with proclaiming God as the Creator. Then we must help people to see the biblical view of history, as did Paul. The witness of Israel's history as a testimony of who Jesus was, is Paul's first line of reasoning. Let note the second witness Paul appeals to...

The **second witness** of that of **John the Baptist** and how he pointed people to Jesus. We read in verses 24-25,

24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

It would seem that some in here in Antioch were already familiar with the ministry and account of John the Baptist. In Acts 19:1-3 we learn that disciples of John had actually settled in Asia Minor, right here were Paul was preaching. These would have known that John testified that Jesus was the Messiah. But the disciples of John were troubled by the fact that Jesus ended up getting killed. If He truly was God's chosen one, then why was it that the religious leaders did not believe in Him? The math did not work. Messiahs are not supposed to die because dead Messiahs are useless. Right?! However, what if Jesus was no longer dead? That would change everything, and this is where Paul appeals to his third witness.

The third witness is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This demonstrates the validity of who He is and what He had said. In verses 26-31 we see three events that point to this third witness...

First, *the people condemned and crucified Jesus.* We read in verses 26-29 this testimony,

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26 Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. 27 For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

Why was it that the religious leaders and the people rejected Jesus as Messiah? Paul is clear; they did not recognize Him or understand what the prophets had spoken. Why did they not recognize Jesus? Because their hearts were calloused to the truth, so much so that they willingly condemned an innocent man. Did the actions of the people surprise God? Of course not. In fact, Paul says that what they did actually fulfilled the words of the prophets made hundreds of years earlier. Notice he said that the prophetic utterances were read every Sabbath. The point is that the people crucified Jesus according to God’s sovereign plan. This brings us to the second event...

Second, *God raised Jesus from the dead.* How important is this fact to Paul? How important is it to our faith? How much ought we to be telling people that Jesus was raised from the dead? Notice with me that four times in verses 30-37 Paul emphasizes this fact.

Verse 30 – “But God raised Him from the dead...”

Verse 33 – “...that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus...”

Verse 34 – “As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead...”

Verse 37 – “...but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.”

Is the resurrection important? The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the central truth of the Christian faith. Without it there is no such thing as the Christian faith. Long ago man named Job asked the big question, that sooner or later every human being has to face. Job asked, “If a man dies, will he live again?”

This same question remains to this day, “Is this life all that there is? Or is there life beyond the grave? Is it possible for anyone to know the answer to this question?” The Christian’s answer to Job’s question is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Christ occupies a central place in the New Testament. It is mentioned directly over one hundred times, four of which are right here in our text. How do we know Jesus was raised? Paul appeals to a third event...

Third, *Jesus was seen by many witnesses.* We read in verse 31 these words, “...and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.”

The resurrection is no fairy tale; no children’s bedtime fable with a good moral message. Many people saw the risen Savior. We are told in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that more than five hundred at one time. Beloved, here is our model for telling others about Jesus; simply give people the faces of the Scriptures. There is no emotional appeal, no tugging on heart strings, no bells and

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whistles, just the facts. Paul tells the people of four witnesses—Israel’s history, John the Baptist, the resurrection, and now the fourth...

The **fourth** and final **witness** Paul appeals to in order to confirm the validity of the person and work of Jesus **is the Word of God**. In verses 32-37 Paul shows that the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament Scriptures, predicted Jesus. Here he quotes from three Old Testament texts that anticipate the resurrection.

32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' 34 As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.' 35 Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' 36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; 37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

Quoting from Psalm 2, Isaiah 55 and then from Psalm 16, Paul was pointing out that all of this happened just as predicted centuries before. God said it would happen and God raised Jesus from the dead.

Let me close today with an observation and then application. Here is the obvious observation; Paul used the Scriptures to do evangelism. Now before you say, “Well, pastor, what else would he use!” I would like to point out that so much of what is called evangelism today in the American church frequently tries everything but what is “obvious” in our text. The church has sought to depend far too much on big name speaker or someone with a dramatic testimony, or sometimes a popular musician or Christian athlete in order to reach the lost.

But let me ask you, are the Scriptures sufficient to change lives today? Do you believe the Word of God, all on its own, is effectual to transform lives? To be sure, Paul could have told the dramatic story—how he was stricken blind by Jesus on the road to Damascus; but he did not do this or even mention that experience in Pisidian, Antioch. What he did was use the Scriptures to tell people about Jesus. Beloved, we must do no less. If we would be resolved to live lives proclaiming Jesus, we must become more acquainted with Jesus. For effective evangelism, for a proper proclamation of Jesus, as modeled here by Paul involves first going where people are, then telling them the truth about Jesus and next week we will explore leading people to a response.

Soli Deo Gloria

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