

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.

The way we ended our message last week affords me a little time to begin with a question that lies at the very heart of what we find Paul and his companions doing here in Acts 13:14-44. It is a question that needs to be continually asked as well as answered biblically. What is that question? We might put it a couple of ways. We could ask, “What is the essential Christian message?” Or, “What is the essence of what must be shared with others so that they may know Jesus?” Or, and most simply put, “What is the gospel?” What is the gospel?

How would you answer the question, “What is the gospel?” Too often, the answer to that question often points to a human result. We hear things like, “The gospel, or good news from God, is that message that causes people to love God and to love others.” Beloved, that is not the biblical gospel. Sometimes the answer may be, “The gospel is that which causes a person to believe and follow Jesus.” That is closer, but that is still not the gospel.

What is the gospel? The gospel is the good news concerning what God has done to defeat the impact and influence of sin, Satan and even death itself through the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ on the cross. How is that different from other answers we hear to the question, “What is the gospel?” Understand this clearly, *the gospel is not about what we do or can do for God, but rather it is about what God has done for us in Jesus*. This is the essence, the essential, the very core of the gospel message. This is what we find Paul preaching.

I am amazed at how often we put additional, qualifying statements alongside the gospel as to what we must do. Now, maybe you are getting a bit uncomfortable. “Pastor, are you saying that there are no requirements, imperatives, or commands for the Christian to live out in his life?” Of course there are such requirements. It is true that Jesus Christ must be the believer’s Lord and Savior. But let me ask you this, does the gospel message include a list of what we must do, of things we must perform, of duties we must execute in order to be saved? No, not one. You see, we sometimes confuse the consequences or the results of the gospel with the actual gospel.

If you are familiar with Paul’s letter to the Romans, you know that from chapter one through halfway into chapter 3, Paul establishes the FACT of universal condemnation; the truth that all have sinned, missed the mark of God’s right standards and thus deserve His eternal wrath and punishment. He demonstrates that humanity, that you and I, rob and belittle God of His glory because of our sin nature, our inclination to do things our way instead of God’s way. And what is Paul’s point? His point is that there is no one, not one person, who has the ability to earn or even keep God’s favor. Why? Because the Bible teaches we are devoid of true righteousness; which is a fancy way of saying that our works do not work. What we do by which we think God should accept us will never measure up to God’s holy standard by which He demands we live. And so, our works, whether they are seemingly good, or seemingly bad, are not only deficient before God, but they are actually offensive to Him because they put us before God.

This is a bad place to be, that place being referred to by theologians as “total depravity” – which does not mean that man is as bad as he can be, but rather that because of sin, man is as bad off as he can be. Just as terminal cancer cares not of age or even the goodness or badness

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

of its victims, the presence of sin, into which each of us is born, puts us in a place of enmity, of conflict, of war against God; and for this condition, this total depravity, there is no earthly cure. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death; death being the enduring of the eternal wrath of God.

And so, from the midpoint of Romans 3, having established this universal bad place into which we all find ourselves, Paul then moves his discussion in Romans 4-5 toward One, that One being Jesus, who has more than satisfied God’s standards of righteous. And not only that, but has made a way for His own righteousness to be imputed, charged to our account, given to us as payment in full; thus earning our righteousness through His own obedience and fully satisfying the righteous anger of God toward us and our sin, sin that kept us alienated from Him. Paul is clear that we are deficient in such works of righteousness on our own, and that we have no works to contribute toward our salvation. Consider Romans 3:10-12;

10 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

And then again in Romans 3:19-20

19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; 20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

The gospel, the good news, what we are to be proclaiming is not what we can do to be right with God, but rather of what God has done in Christ to make us right with Him. Romans 4-5 speak of this and leads to Paul’s anticipation of a question. Listen to Romans 6:1-2;

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Paul is answering the question that naturally flows from his arguments in the previous chapters; that if salvation is all of grace, all the work of God alone, and apart from any works that we do, then can a person actually be obligated to do anything for God and continue to live however he like? The answer to this question lies in the powerful results of Christ’s work on the cross. The argument of Paul in Romans is so clear that salvation is solely the work of God through Christ that people wonder what they can do, if anything. Let me ask you, when was the last time someone asked you a question like this: “If salvation is all by grace and Jesus paid for all my sin, then why can I not just do whatever I want?” And what does the “I” want? The “I” or me wants to sin.

I would say that we do not get questions like this when we share the gospel because we do not clearly and purposely share the gospel correctly. We add so many things to the gospel that allow people to think they are contributing to their salvation or even earning it that we may

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

not be preaching the gospel at all. If we were being biblical in our presentation of the gospel, then we would get questions from unbelievers like those that Paul did here in Romans 6. Those who live by legalism, who believe salvation is earned or kept by rules will be offended by the gospel of free grace. Those who live by church traditions will be offended by the suggestion that their practices do not merit them eternal life. Here is the deal. Here is what I want you to consider. When you do share the gospel, do you inject just enough personal works for a self-righteous Pharisee type of person to agree with you?

We want the gospel to appeal to people, right? We want them to instantly and joyously embrace the gospel, right? But the gospel first crushes people before it brings them joy. The gospel tears a person’s sense of self-dependence and self-reliance and self-righteousness before it lifts them up to the loving arms of God.

But I know the argument; “Pastor, we need to tell people the full expectation of the Christian message; that coming to Christ will cost something.” I agree, but sometimes in the process we confuse the life-liberating power of the gospel with the life-giving fruit of the gospel. And if you are doing this then you are confusing people. In fact, you may be in danger of adding to the gospel?

We condemn the Roman Catholics for their treasury of merit by which salvation can be purchased; we look down upon the Church of Christ for promoting baptismal regeneration – that salvation comes only as we get ourselves baptized in water. However, we can be just as guilty of adding things like law, personal works and merits to our message of the gospel! This is exactly what we do when we say that the message of the gospel includes that you and I must love God and love our neighbor. We cannot love God or rightly love our neighbor until we are saved and salvation is from sin; from knowing ourselves to be sinners, dead to God, in a horrible condition and in need of a Savior. The message of the Gospel is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. As the Spirit works in me to confess that I am a sinner and believe the work of Christ, then the Spirit begins to bring forth the fruit of the gospel, a love toward God and others; a passion for His word and to make it known. As good and important as these good works are in the life of the Christian, we must remember that they are results of the gospel but not the gospel. There is a huge difference. Our goal is to be so works of Christ saturated and grace boasting that people will ask us, like they did Paul, about how our works fit into or with the gospel. When we begin to have others ask us such questions, then we can know we are rightly preaching the gospel.

And it is this resolve to live as those who constantly proclaim the gospel that is our focus here in Acts 13:14-44. From this text there are three non-negotiables that must be at the very core of what we are doing as a result of our salvation in Christ. Remember that Jesus said in Acts 1:8 that we would be, not might be, not even could be, but that we would be His witnesses throughout the earth. If you are saved; if you truly know Christ; if His Spirit is at work in you, then you will be witnesses for Jesus, telling others about the free grace of the gospel. We looked at the first two of these means by which we can be effective in evangelism last week.

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

“But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.”

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

In verses 14-15 we see that upon arrival to Pisidian Antioch, Paul went to where the people were, there in the synagogue; the Jewish congregation. Paul did not wait for people to come to him but rather went to them to speak of Jesus. I do not want to belabor this point, but let me say that for most of us, going to where people are is not the problem. Most of us go to where people are, be it at work, at school or even shopping. The problem for most of us is not in the act of going, but with the motivation for going. Most of us “go” to work in order to be paid, to buy food, pay for the mortgage, etc. You might go to school to get your education, to see your friends and the like. But for the believer, our going is not to be incidental but intentional; not for mere personal matters but for the purpose of God. We forget that we are Christ’s witnesses always and our purpose is to use our goings as vehicles through which to tell others about Jesus. So then, let us not just go, but know that our going is to be with the purpose of revealing Jesus to others. That was the first means of effective evangelism. The second was...

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

We do not just mingle in a group of people and hope that somehow some knowledge of Jesus will just leak through our faces. You may be a Christian in the middle of a group of unbelievers; and you know you are a Christian, but how many of those unbelievers know you are a Christian; why you are Christian; and ultimately what it means to be a Christian?

Remember that Paul used three witnesses from verses 16-37 in order to point people to Jesus. We can use Scripture, like Paul did, to show people who Jesus is. Paul used Israel’s History (the Old Testament) to point to Jesus (16-23); he used the testimony of John the Baptist to point people to Jesus (24-25), he used the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (30, 33, 34, 37) and finally he used the Word or promises of God (32-37).

What are the essential truths about God’s Word and Jesus that need to be told by us? Let me remind you in the form of five simple questions you need to remember and answer:

1. Who is God? (who He is, Holy/Creator; perfect, righteous)
2. Who is man? (created to worship God, but fallen in sin, separated from God)
3. What is sin? (rebellion against God)
4. Who is Jesus? (God’s provision for our salvation)
5. How do you respond? (Belief or disbelief)

We must tell them the truth about Jesus, but as that fifth question implies, there is one more thing. Not only do we go; not only are we to tell, but finally, we must

III. Lead people to a response (38-43)

If we would be resolved to live a life proclaiming Jesus, we must learn it is not enough to tell them the truth about Jesus and leave it at that. We need to present them with such a picture of Jesus, they will ask the question, “What must I *do* to be saved?” This is what the convicted audience asked Peter in Acts 2:37 and it is what the Philippian Jailer asked Paul in Acts 16. And then, once the question is asked, we must lead our hearers through what is to happen next. And our verses reveal four such things we share with people after we have shared the gospel

First, we share **the offer of forgiveness**. In verses 38-39 we read, *38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through*

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

These would have been stunning words to the Jews who heard Paul. Ask a Jew, “what must you do to be saved?” and he would have responded that you needed to offer animal sacrifices to cover your sins. For some 1500 years, the Jews had been sacrificing animals, year by year, as a temporary covering for sin. And now, here is Paul, who said that through [Jesus], literally “this One; of this One alone”, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you! In other words, there would be no more need for the Jew to take a lamb altar as a sin sacrifice. Why? Well, the *true* Lamb had been offered and slain by God! The work of people offering sacrifices was removed by God, but how is this sacrifice that brings final and complete forgiveness to be realized? Paul presents it two ways, positively and negatively.

Positively, if we believe this work of Jesus, we are justified by God. To be justified is to be declared right with God. Jesus did the work for us and if we but believe it, God graciously sets us free from the guilt and condemnation of our sin. According to Paul, God frees us from all things. We are reminded that forgiveness is not earned but is given by God to those who believe that Jesus did what He did on the cross to free you from your sin. To those who believe, God declares them “right”!

But Paul puts it negatively as well reminding his hearers that no person can be justified, declared right, set free from the consequences of their sins by the law of Moses. As an ex-Pharisee, Paul understood this firsthand. Paul had worked and worked and worked to keep the law of God, to earn his righteousness, but he could never get past the consequences of sin, which was death. No one can get past the consequences of sin. No one can make his sinful heart right by what he does. However, if we but believe in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice, God justifies us. This is exactly what Paul was saying in Romans 4:4-5;

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

Now, if we refuse to believe these things about our inability to save ourselves, if we try to reach God on the basis of our merit, we remain in our sins. There is no other option. But the truth is that forgiveness of all your sin is available! That is truly good news! So, as we talk with people about what Jesus did at the cross, we get to extend God’s offer of forgiveness to them. We can say along with the hymn-writer:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power.
Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome, God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance, every grace that brings you nigh.
Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of Him.
Come, ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you’re better, you will never come at all.*

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

In leading people to respond to the gospel, we must present God’s offer of forgiveness; but there is one more thing to present, just as the hymn writer did in the final stanza; **second**, we must **offer a warning**. Look with me at verses 40-41 where we read:

40 Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 41 ‘BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.’

Here Paul is quoting from the OT Prophet Habakkuk (1:5). God had told Habakkuk and Israel that He was going to do something so incredible that nobody would believe it, not even Habakkuk. God was going to raise up the Babylonians to judge the Judah, which He did some four years later in 606 BC. The point here is that when God promises to do something, He does it. And even more remarkable than judging His own people with the Babylonians, God promises to forgive any person, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Jesus. Now the people in Habakkuk’s day did not believe God and it cost them. So here is the warning, "Beware!" – that is the word the KJV uses at the beginning of verse 40. Take heed, pay attention and do not make the same mistake of disbelief in God’s promise. His offer of forgiveness and freedom from sin will not last forever; today is the day of salvation!

Notice how Paul ends his message. There is no invitation, no repeating over and over some line from a hymn like “Just as I am”. He closed with no antidotal story. He did not have them bow their heads and close their eyes (or is that bow your eyes and close you heads) and ask for a show of hands. There was no aisle to walk down. All Paul did was to proclaim the truth about God’s offer of forgiveness followed by a warning regarding the seriousness of refusing God’s offer. That was the end of the message. He stopped speaking and let the people have time to think. . In so doing he gave them time to think about it.

This is the **third** way in which we lead people to Jesus; we **give them time to ponder Jesus**. We see this in verse 42 where we read, *“As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.”* We can often push people into decisions that they are not ready for. Notice that did not hurry them or force them into making a rash decision. He taught them from the Word, gave them strong warning, and then gave the people time to think and the Holy Spirit time to open eyes.

This brings us to the **fourth** and final way in which we lead people to Jesus; **we keep the focus on God’s grace**. We read in verse 43, *“Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.”*

How do we know if the Spirit is at work when we go, tell and lead people to Christ? Well, is there an interest? Do people want to hear more from God’s Word? And, if there is an interest, where is our focus to be? Notice how verse 42 ends, with an urging (convincing, persuading – Romans 8:38; Philippians 1:6) to continue **“in the grace of God.”** This is in contrast to continuing in the law, the works they could try to do. Beloved, in case you did not know, “self” dies hard. By default, we think we can contribute something to our standing with God. But it is all of grace. Remember Ephesians 2:8? For by grace are you saved. Remember 2 Peter 3:18, it is by

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

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

grace that we grow spiritually. Remember 1 Peter 4:10? It is by grace that we serve. By grace do we grow (2 Pet 3:18). By grace do we serve (1 Pet 4:10). Beloved, it begins and ends with the grace of God.

So, if we would be fishers of men; if we would be effective in evangelism and resolved to rightly proclaim Jesus, we must go, intentionally and purposely go to people, tell them the truth about Jesus and lead them through a response. With that, I think you are all ready to go fishing.

But as we close, let me make some applications by way of three resolves I would have you make:

First, would you **resolve to be prepared for action**. If someone were to ask you, as they did Paul in verse 15, “Bring us a word of exhortation! Tell us something!” Would you be able to respond with the gospel, of what God has done for us in and through Christ? If we would be resolved to proclaim Christ we must first resolve to saturate ourselves in God’s word and even practice presenting the gospel to one another so that we can do it more effectively “out there.” Memorize the Romans’ Road verses, read how Jesus engaged people, but be prepared.

Second, **resolve to ask God for open doors**. Jesus refers to the Father as the Lord of the harvest. Would we pray, believing, “Father, would You give me an opportunity to talk to a lost person today about Your Son, Jesus?” Would you pray that for me and for others here. And then let us look for the answers. Listen to how Paul prayed in Colossians 4:2-3;

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned...

Let our resolve be to ask God to open doors of opportunity. And then, **third** and finally, would you **resolve to speak about Jesus anytime the opportunity arises**.

It is needful to invite people to church, to help them through different difficulties and trials, but we have not been witnesses until we have *told them about Jesus*. So when God gives you the opportunity, would you resolve to talk about Jesus. Remember what Jesus said in John 14:6, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”** Not through my good works, or my efforts, but through Jesus, through the knowledge of Jesus. So let us go, let us tell and let us lead people to Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2013 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.