

Evangelism #2

By Bob Young

Last week we introduced a study of evangelism—perhaps different than you expected. We tried to make these points by way of introduction:

1. We are in the midst of a cultural shift that has been underway in full force for almost 15 years. We tried to briefly describe some aspects of that cultural shift. We will expand that tonight.

2. We were reminded of the 3 Ps of evangelism: presence, proclamation and persuasion. I suggested we must add a fourth—preparation. People must be prepared to hear the gospel.

Then we spent our time in Acts 13 and attempted to show that something significant was happening in the move from the Jews to the Gentiles. We contrasted Acts 1-12 and Acts 13-28. We tried to show that the first part of the book narrates the process of taking the gospel to religious people, but that eventually the religious people reject the new religion. Thus, the gospel is taken to the non-religious. Taking the gospel to the non-religious, or to the superstitious religious requires a different kind of preparation. The narrative of Acts provides a wonderful parallel for us, and we will explore that in more detail tonight.

Our application was that we face a very parallel situation in our contemporary world, especially in the US. People do not know the basic facts of Christianity. Some families have been away from the church for 2-3 generations. We will need a new approach which honors the need for preparing our friends, neighbors, and communities to hear this gospel. That is Part Two—our subject tonight.

The best part of what we shared last week is that when we understand these concepts, every Christian can have a part in sharing the gospel, every Christian can play a part in evangelism.

Post-Christian society:

- 30 years ago—Jimmy Carter candidate for president—research analysts in frenzy, who is this curious creature—an orthodox Christian.
- Church group at NCAA playoffs, two well-dressed couples seated immediately behind them were debating what “John 3:16” meant. New restaurant in town, can’t be advertising with hand-drawn sign and orange hair, sign to meet John on third floor, section 16. Clueless!
- 1997—most footnoted thinkers, of top 23, only Aquinas made the list.
- Harvard professor in New Yorker article admits that he is religious, but says he keeps it hidden because at Harvard spirituality is considered “one of those conditions that suggest some lapse of hygiene of those afflicted, as with worms or lice.”
- Postmodern society seems intrinsically hostile to the Christian faith. Yet there are signs of hope. Jesus identifies with this new element of society—they sense instinctively that he was one of them.

What does the Bible say about taking the gospel to the Gentiles?

Continue study beyond Acts 13....

Chapter 14

Iconium—seeking boldly, persecuted, move to next field

Lystra/Derbe—appeal to God as creator, natural revelation, historical backgrounds, stoned

Revisits—strengthen, encourage, appoint leaders, trusting in God

Report to sending church—opened doors of faith to the Gentiles

Chapter 15

Peace-making, get all of church on same page, recognize that we are imperfect people

Chapter 16

Philippi—go to religious people, confront secular world, suffer, use opportunities.

Chapter 17

Thessalonica—Reason, explain, prove, persuade; jealousy

Berea—well-received, persecuted

Athens—religious people, find evidences of their spiritual/supernatural hunger, speak according to human wisdom, building bridges, still could not accept concept of resurrection, a few believed.

Chapter 18

Corinth—persuading, preaching, testifying. Include others in the process, develop personal relationships, persecution, dependence on God, teach individuals—Apollos

Chapter 19

Ephesus—synagogue for 3 months, then actually went into educational system where there was an opportunity, moved outside obviously religious realm.

Chapter 22

Jerusalem—spoke in their language

Chapter 24

Reasoned with Felix of righteousness, self-control, judgment

Chapter 26

Reasoned with Felix

Chapter 27-28

Depended on God, seized opportunities, gospel spread “unhinderly”

Loren Mead—where is the mission field?

Reinventing the congregation/evangelism for a new mission field.

1. Mission has always shaped the life of the Church.
2. Changes in our ways of thinking about mission/evangelism have confused much of what we are doing.
3. Pressure points in the lives of congregations.
4. Large shifts in religious consciousness.
5. Understand the call.

Three responses: frantic efforts to develop new programs to re-attract all the eroded support, hold steady and hope for the best, move into new paradigm of evangelism rebuilding the church and its structures as we go.

Many churches have drawn their last unassisted breath long ago—now on a type of life support, and the way we have redefined ministry is a life-support system. Everything revolves around the ministry machine.

In first century, no boundary between world and church, church daily touches world. In a Christian society, there is a buffer zone, a boundary, and mission came to be defined as going forth into foreign fields. Now the church is again in a situation where it daily touches the world, only we are withdrawing and having as little to do as possible with the world we touch.

Implications in the Christendom model: little distinction between the sacred and the secular, mission is a distant enterprise, geographic definitions of church, administrative requirements. Today: cannot assume everyone is a Christian, community is no longer clearly Christian living out values which derive from gospel, mission territory is right next door. Empire and church are not necessarily one.

We have moved from a culture of Christendom to the pre-Christian mission field. We have moved from a church-broken society to a society either unchurched or overchurched. Pre-Christian era has begun with whole new understanding of evangelism.

There are at least 120 million pre-Christian people age 14 or older in our country.

Only 2 countries have more nonbelievers than the US—India and China. US is 3rd largest mission field in the world.

Yet few Christians have relationships or friendships with nonbelievers. “Too churchy.”

Second mission of today’s church is to the over-churched—100 million adults, 30 million children, “involved in religious ritual with little connection to Christ” (Barna). Only 10% of 320,000 churches in US are effective. Post-modern churches are filled with religious people with little faith in Christ.

How do we reconceptualize a Christianity (NT Christianity?) that is not tied to the familiar church culture?

I remember reading about an organization in Japan, the No Church Church. Now have a *NonChurchgoer’s Guide to the Bible*, supposedly free of church or denominational taint.

Our need is to connect people with the living Christ. Evangelism no longer says to the world, “come to church.” Rather it says to the church, “Go to the world.” We are being called more to the John the Baptist model than the Peter/Paul model. We must learn to construct new constituencies for Christ.

We can be the last of a dying breed of churches, left standing on a burning platform, going down with the Titanic, or we can be the front-guard of a new breed of churches. A dinosaur in a tar pit or on the frontline of a new surge to move

the church out of our buildings into the world where we live, in faith facing the world as it really is, and helping the world to see its own helplessness and hopelessness.

Christianity is still the religion of choice in our nation—we must seize the opportunity. We must hold up Christianity with personal conviction and make clear that Christianity requires conviction. We must indicate our desire to serve.

Time of Bible illiteracy. Think in today's frameworks. 8/10 in US claim to be Christian, 4/10 cannot name the four gospels. Only ½ of those who claim to be born again read the Bible sometime during the week.

One minister tells of visiting with a seat mate on the plane, trying to initiate an evangelistic conversation, finally the question, who is this "apostle Paul"?

Our problem in evangelism is not lack of training, but lack of action. Evangelism requires love. Will we take the gospel in contemporary frameworks, modeling, active, examples, preparing the soil, listening to hearts.