

EVANGELISTIC PREACHING AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

JERRY VINES
First Baptist Church,
Jacksonville, FL 32202

Introduction

Acts tells the story of the birth of the church of Jesus Christ and its development from Jerusalem to Rome. Acts has been called “Infant’s Progress,” for it traces the history and growth of the “baby church” from its inception in Jerusalem. It is a thrilling and challenging book because it is the account of real people taking seriously the command of Jesus to win others to Christ. J. B. Phillips calls it, “The Young Church in Action.” Here is church dynamics at its best!

Acts provides many wonderful opportunities for evangelistic preaching to the lost, as well as equipping proclamation to believers. Indeed, Acts could be called “the Witness Book.” As one reads through it, note how many times the word witness occurs. Acts 1:8 is the key verse which unlocks the door to the whole book. This verse is the key to the structure, subject matter, and practical purpose of the book. Acts is intended to make us personal witnesses. Note the purpose of the book. Acts 1:1-2 teaches us that the ministry of Jesus is to be continued: “all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Consider the person of the book. Various titles have been suggested such as the “Acts of the Apostles” and the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.” Actually, the emphasis is upon Jesus. He is the main actor! He is the theme! Finally, one should claim the promise of the book. Acts 1:4-5 talks about the promise of the Father. This promise (the coming of the Holy Spirit in power of Pentecost) is instructive today.

These sermonic studies are designed to utilize Acts as the basis for training and motivating people in continuous lifestyle evangelism. Through Acts we can glean principles and guidelines which can be used today.

*"Ready to Go!" (Acts 1:1-11)**Sermon Aim*

To lead our people to understand that the Great Commission is for them today and to show them the spiritual ingredients and encouragement necessary to carry it out.

Outline

- I. Proofs of the Resurrection (vv 1-3)
- II. Presence of the Holy Spirit (vv 4-5)
- III. Power for Witness (vv 6-8)
- IV. Promise of His Second Coming (vv 9-11)

Introduction

It is thrilling to note that some form of what we can call the Great Commission is found in each of the first five books of the NT (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). It seems the Holy Spirit has gone to some length to impress upon Christians the urgency of winning others to Jesus. This certainly indicates to us that personal soul-winning must be the priority item of every church and every individual Christian. As one preaches this text, one will want to make it clear that: 1) the Great Commission is a command, not a suggestion; and 2) it is for every Christian, not just for the pastors, staff members, deacons, and Sunday School teachers.

The preaching material should be gathered around the key verse of the book, Acts 1:8, emphasizing our mandate from heaven, our Lord's marching orders. One might preach Acts 1:1-11 around a four fold outline.

I. Proofs of the Resurrection (vv 1-3)

In v 1, "former treatise" is a reference to Luke's Gospel (cf. Luke 1:1-4). Acts is the second volume written by Luke. Note also the word, "began." In the Gospels, we find what Jesus began. In Acts we find what Jesus continued. A tremendously touching truth is indicated. Jesus is not dead; he is alive! Here is a truth which can help us overcome our fears. As we witness we do not go alone; our living Lord goes with us.

Jesus himself said in Matt 28:20, "Lo, I am with you." The presence of the living Lord transformed the early disciples from cowardice to courage, from fear to great boldness. The church is not a shrine to a

dead leader; it is the army of the living Lord. As we seek to win men to him, he will be real to us. The tomb is empty, the body could not be produced, the disciples were transformed; they even died martyrs' deaths. The reality of the resurrection is a certainty in uncertain times that empowers us to tell the "good news" of Jesus.

II. Presence of the Holy Spirit (vv 4-5)

Verses 4 and 5 contain the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. As we know, this promise was fulfilled in Acts 2. At salvation, every Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 3:16). The Holy Spirit makes the person of Christ real in our hearts. God has provided us with his power to carry out his commission.

III. Power for Witness (vv 6-8)

We come here to the specific statement of our responsibility to tell others about Jesus. In vv 6-7 the disciples asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Though he did not deny the kingdom would be restored, he did indicate that they were not to become entangled in matters concerning the future to the neglect of their main business. Though he denied them authority to know all of the details of the future, he promised them the ability to work for him in the here and now.

The key word in v 8 is "witnesses." A witness is someone who has seen something and can say something about it. A witness tells what he knows to be true. Indeed, he is one who 1) sees, 2) speaks, and possibly even 3) suffers for what he has seen and spoken.

The conclusion of Acts 1:8 indicates the places where witnessing is to occur. They are to begin where they are, "Jerusalem." "Judaea and Samaria" indicates that the disciples are to witness to those around them. "Unto the uttermost part of the earth" means, to the end of the earth. Being a Christian never makes one's world smaller; it makes it larger.

IV. Promise of His Second Coming (vv 9-11)

Verses 9-11 record the moving account of the ascension of Christ back to heaven and the promise that one day he would return. Note that they returned to Jerusalem (v 12), they did not remain on the mountain as "stargazers." The fact that Jesus is coming again should be a powerful motivation to be soul-winners.

Conclusion

The Great Commission is not optional. It is to be carried out by churches and Christians until he returns. It is for every person who knows Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior. To be a witness for Jesus is to be a way of life for us today, just as it was for the 1st century Christians.

*"Witnessing on the Way" (Acts 3:1-10)**Sermon Aim*

To prepare our church for the unexpected witness and to lead them to develop a personalized witness which can prayerfully be used.

Outline

- I. The Cripple (vv 1-3)
- II. The Christians (vv 4- 7a)
- III. The Christ (vv 7b-10)

Introduction

There are several objectives to be discussed in this wonderful text. First, we want to show the variety of opportunities for witness as we go about the living of daily life. Second, God will use our particular personality, unique gifts, and own approach in winning others to Christ. I Pet 3:15 says, "Be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear ." We must also "be ready."

I. The Cripple (vv 2-3)

As we study the condition of this cripple, we learn several things about him. He had a congenital birth defect (v 2) for over 40 years (4:22). His physical condition is illustrative of the spiritual condition of those outside Christ. We live in a world crippled by sin (Rom 3:23; 5:12). All around us are the cripples-moral, emotional, and spiritual.

II. The Christians (vv 4-7a)

We now turn our attention to Peter and John. Observe how quick they were to catch the opportunity God gave them. The beggar was begging alms from them.

We are told that the cripple was "expecting to receive something of them" (v 5). But Peter said, "silver and gold have I none; but such as

I have give I thee. . ." (v 6). Peter dealt with what the man really needed. His real need was healing which only Jesus Christ could give.

III. The Christ (vv 7b-10)

The remaining verses of the text focus attention upon what Jesus Christ did for the man. His cure was instantaneous (v 7). The verb phrase, "received strength," in v 7 is picturesque, indicating the man's heel and ankle were put back together again. The change in the man was remarkable. Note the sequence. First, he stood; next, he walked; then, he leaped. Isa 35:6 predicted, "Then shall the lame leap as a hart. . ." The man quickly headed into the temple, where he had always been forbidden to worship.

Conclusion

As Peter and John were going along the way, the Lord placed a needy man before them. They had the solution to his deepest need. Though the opportunity was unexpected, they used it to effectively give a witness for Jesus. The Lord used their efforts to bring the man to Christ.

"Scattering the Seed" (Acts 8:1-25)

Sermon Aim

To help people understand that wherever they are they have an opportunity to witness, and to help them understand the process of cultivative witnessing so they might be a part of that process.

Outline

- I. An Explanation (vv 1-4)
- II. An Illustration (vv 5-25)

Introduction

Pentecost started a fire burning. In Acts 1:8 Jesus gave the disciples the assignment to carry the fire from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. This geographical outline of Acts begins to unfold. In chaps. 1-7 we see the gospel carried to Jerusalem; in chaps. 8-12 it is carried to Judaea and Samaria. Chapters 13-28 show the gospel going to the ends of the earth.

We will study our text around two main topics. First, there is an explanation of the reasons for the "scattering" which the early disciples experienced. Second, the witnessing of Philip in the city of Samaria is a beautiful illustration of how the cultivative witnessing process works.

I. An Explanation (vv 1-4)

The chapter begins with an account of the outburst of persecution against the Jerusalem church, a recurring theme in Acts. This particular persecution was precipitated by the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7). Then, persecution burst upon the church like a storm. As a result of this persecution we are told, "They were all scattered abroad" (v 1). The words indicate they were dispersed like seed planted in a field. The same picture is used of Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, primarily for the purpose of trade (John 7:35). Verse 4 tells us what the scattered disciples did. They "went everywhere preaching the word." Everywhere they went they were scattering the seed of the gospel.

II. An Illustration (vv 5-25)

Actually, the rest of Acts 8 illustrates the process of cultivative witnessing. We will focus on the record of the witnessing of deacon Philip in the City of Samaria.

Philip was one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6). He was not an apostle, but he was a faithful witness for Jesus. As a result of Philip's witnessing and preaching, many people in Samaria came to Christ. Verse 12 says they were baptized. This indicates that their salvation experiences were real. Total evangelism is not completed until the new convert is baptized and actively serving Christ in the fellowship of a local church.

"Catching Chariots" (Acts 8:26-40)

Sermon Aim

To help your church understand the need for sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit when sharing the gospel.

Outline

- I. A Prepared Sinner (vv 26-31)
- II. A Prompt Soul-winner (vv 26-31)
- III. A Powerful Scripture (vv 32-35)
- IV. A Personal Salvation (vv 36-40)

Introduction

In this passage, we have a full presentation of the gospel. Philip's witness to the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the best places in the Bible to see the gospel's powerful capability when one obediently follows the

leading of the Holy Spirit. Philip was willing to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, catch the opportunity the Spirit placed before him, use the Word of God effectively, and bring the eunuch to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

I. A Prepared Sinner (vv 26-31)

In v 27 we find a picture of the man we commonly refer to as the Ethiopian eunuch. We are told that he was "a eunuch of great authority." In Oriental courts, eunuchs often held important offices. It is also obvious that the eunuch was a religious man. Verse 27 also says that he "had come to Jerusalem for to worship." He was possibly what was known as a God-fearer, one who had become a convert to the Jewish faith.

These verses also teach that the eunuch had been spiritually prepared for a witness. As he rode along, he read from the scroll of Isaiah. Here is a man high in political life, yet he is reading from God's Word. Unknown to Philip, God was preparing this man for his faithful witness.

II. A Prompt Soul-Winner (vv 26-31)

We observe several characteristics of the soul-winner in Philip. He was obedient. Remember that he was in the midst of a great revival in Samaria (vv 5-8). Multitudes were being saved. Then he was called upon to do a difficult thing--leave the multitudes, and travel 100 miles south to a desert place. He was not even told why he must go.

III. A Powerful Scripture (vv 32-35)

The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53. It has been pointed out that Isaiah is a "miniature" Bible, and may be divided into two sections of 39 and 27 books respectfully. The center chapter of the latter section in Isaiah is chap. 53. The central verses of that chapter are exactly the verses where the eunuch was reading.

The eunuch inquired about the identity of the one Isaiah refers to as "a sheep led to the slaughter" (v 32). Verse 35 says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

IV. A Personal Salvation (vv 36-40)

From these verses it is obvious that the Word has done its work; God's Spirit has opened the heart of the eunuch. The eunuch answered,

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v 37). At that faith took hold of the Word. He was ready to be baptized.

Conclusion

Several principles can be observed from this text. First, we be willing to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit when he places before us opportunities to witness. Second, the indispensable tool in our witnessing is the Word of God. Through the Word we share Jesus with others. Third, when the Word is sown in a human heart, things happen.

"All Things To All People" (Acts 16:9-40)

Sermon Aim

To help our people understand the variety of witnessing opportunities and how to approach them.

Outline

- I. A Cultured Sinner (vv 9-15)
- II. A Captured Sinner (vv 16-18)
- III. A Calloused Sinner (vv 19-40)

Introduction

Acts 16 is one of the most pivotal chapters in Acts. The chapter is a classic presentation of God's guidance in the life of a believer. It records for us the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey. As Paul sought to find God's direction for his missionary endeavor, the Holy Spirit led by closing several doors (cf. 16:6-7). Then came the vision, "come over into Macedonia, and help us" (v 9). God's guidance was clear.

Presently Paul and his party came to Philippi, a strategic location. Although Paul's ministry in Philippi began in a very insignificant manner, his work in Philippi is marked by three notable conversions: a woman of culture, an abused slave girl, and a hardened jailor. This tells us that the gospel is for male and female, bond, and free (cf. Gal 3:28).

I. A Cultured Sinner (vv 9-15)

The heart of Lydia was a fertile field for the seed of the gospel. The Scripture indicates that she was a distinguished lady, a "seller of purple." Her native town, Thyatira, was famous for its purple dyed garments. She obviously had religious inclinations since she was gath-

ered with a group of women for a prayer meeting. Lydia is what we might call a cultured sinner. None of the things which distinguished her satisfied her.

The phrase, "whose heart the Lord opened," is a beautiful statement of what the Lord can do in a person's life. This places emphasis on the divine side of conversion. Only God can open the heart.

But now observe the human side. Verse 14 also says, "She attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul." She responded to what God was doing in her heart. To open was God's part; to respond was Lydia's part; and to bring the two together was Paul's part.

Verse 15 records the beautiful sequel to Lydia's conversion. Paul opened the Word; God opened Lydia's heart; she opened her home. This open heart of one woman in the city of Philippi became a beach-head for God.

She used her house as a place where the gospel could be continued. She said, "Come into my house" (v 15). She dedicated her home to the work of the gospel.

II. A Captured Sinner (vv 16-18)

Everywhere Paul went there was either a revival or a riot. The conversion of the slave girl was the event which resulted in Paul's imprisonment. The slave girl and Lydia were exact opposites. The slave girl was on the bottom of the social scale. Furthermore, the slave girl was also possessed with a spirit of divination.

Paul grew weary of the girl's hindrance to his ministry. In v 18, he healed her in the name of Jesus. Christ calmed the storm raging in her soul, making her a new person. This is admittedly a dramatic conversion experience.

III. A Calloused Sinner (vv 19-40)

These verses examine Paul's experience in the Philippian jail. He was stripped of his clothing and slashed across his bared back until the blood flowed. But through it all God was at work, making arrangements for Paul to come into contact with another kind of sinner.

The jailer was a hardened man. Perhaps his job had made him tough, dealing with the rougher element of society. He was charged with the responsibility of keeping Paul and his companions in prison (v 23), guarding them with his life.

The jailer showed them no mercy, no bandage for their wounds, no food for their stomachs. He threw them into the "inner prison"

(v 24), a place with little ventilation, plenty of darkness, oppressive heat, and an intolerable stench. Then he placed their feet "in the stocks" (v 24).

What a picture v 25 paints. At midnight there was praying and singing heard down in the prison. Paul and Silas were praying and praising the Lord. "The prisoners heard them" (v 25), and never had such singing been heard in that prison before.

We learn from v 26 that there was a great earthquake, the doors of the prison were opened, and the prisoners' chains fell off. Certainly there was one calloused sinner who was shaken that night.

The jailer awakened to find himself in a real crisis (v 27). Thinking he had lost his prisoners, he was ready to commit suicide. Paul shouted to him, "Do yourself no harm; for we are all here" (v 28). The jailer rushed in and asked the most important question anyone can ever ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v 30). Paul had the right answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house" (v 31).

Conclusion

As we look back over the contents of this message, keep in mind the title of the sermon, "All Things to All People." We have studied three different kinds of witnessing experiences. One was the quiet conversion of Lydia, the career woman. Her conversion opened doors of opportunity for the gospel where it might not otherwise have gone. Others will come in contact with those who are on the bottom of the social scale who also need Jesus. Still others will be with people in crisis experiences. Some people are not responsive to a presentation of the gospel until a crisis comes.

Conclusion

The Book of Acts is a fertile field for the expository preacher. It is without question the most exciting book of the NT from the perspective of evangelistic expansion. In these sermon studies, we have focused on those texts which are particularly powerful in demonstrating to our people 1) the power of the gospel and 2) presentations of the gospel. We have seen that the message is always the same, but that the methods of presentation vary according to circumstances, personalities, and most importantly, the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is my prayer that as you teach and preach from this marvelous second volume from the pen of Luke, that God will use you to challenge anew your people in the greatest opportunity of life, sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with a lost and needy soul.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

The Criswell College;

4010 Gaston Ave.

Dallas, TX 75246

www.criswell.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu