

I have had this question put to me lately so this morning we are going to try to answer it. The question is how do I share the Gospel? How do I bring people to Jesus Christ? How do I bring people to church? In the midst of all this the *PREACHER* will not leave us alone about going out those doors and bringing people to church. In this morning's passage the Apostle Paul gives us a positive snapshot of what sharing the Gospel can look like.

The first thing we have to do if we are going to share the Gospel is take a hard look at our fears. Church, how many of y'all are afraid to talk to people about Jesus Christ? **(pause and raise my hand)** How many of y'all are SKEERD when the preacher says we should all be willing to share the good news of Jesus Christ? **(pause)** I'll bet; I am willing to bet good money there are plenty of people in this room who are scared to death at the idea of sharing the Gospel. So let me tell y'all something quick about fear. "Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering" (Master Yoda: Star Wars the Phantom Menace). **Thank you Master Yoda.** Some of y'all are afraid to talk about Jesus outside of this room. Some of y'all are afraid to talk about Jesus inside this room – and some of those who are afraid to talk about Jesus are angry with me for encouraging y'all to get up off your pews, to head out those doors and talk to people about Jesus. **(pause)** See how that works? Fear leads to anger. The problem is I am one person. I am not from Denton. I am not truly from anywhere. I will never have the same acceptance or connections in this town as a person who was born and raised here. That's where all y'all come in. See, a church is not about one human being. A church is a group of people who are so focused on God and serving God they are drawn together when they put God first. Do y'all remember this? Here's the church. Here's the steeple. Look inside at all the people? A church is a group of people who are pulled together because put God first - not when they put the pastor first. When a church is afraid to share the Gospel, anger takes over. The church shrinks because people are more concerned with being angry and who to blame than with serving God. People hate to see their church shrink and the suffering of the congregation continues out into the community. **(pause)** This is the challenge we face. Let's think together about what we are supposed to do.

The first thing we have to do is to pay attention to which voice we are listening too. Two weeks ago we discussed two women. One had a spirit of divination. The other, Lydia worshipped God the Holy Spirit. Just like Paul it is important to figure out which spirit is which. This is how to tell the difference between spirits of division and God's voice of truth. God's voice of Truth does not say, "You can't," do something. The voice of Truth may say 'Do not do something,' but this is different from "You can't." The voice of Truth tells a different story. The voice of Truth says "DO NOT BE AFRAID.' In God's grace you can do anything for God's glory.

Let's take Paul for example. The Apostle Paul was in the city of Athens. At that time Athens was filled with idols and those who worshipped false gods. There were philosophers and stoics who spent their days arguing and discussing new religions. In the midst of it all there was Paul. The Spirit of God spoke to Paul's spirit and moved Paul to action. With no support from Silas, Timothy or Luke, Paul began sharing the Gospel in the Synagogues and market places. Some of the Epicurean and stoic philosophers grabbed a hold of Paul and drug Paul to a place called the Aereopaus. Keep in mind by this time Paul has been beaten and stoned several times in different places for sharing the Gospel. If it were me, and I were treated like that I would have been scared. I would have been scared I was about to be beaten, or stoned or killed. **(pause)** Scripture does not tell us what Paul was thinking or feeling, but let me tell you what Paul did. Paul seized the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus Christ.

Church, how did Paul do that? **(pause)** Church, how do you think Paul was able or ready to share the Gospel in this moment? **(pause)** How was it the Spirit was able to use Paul in that moment? **(pause)** Any suggestions? Any ideas? **(pause)** Let's try it this way. Choir. At Christmas y'all always sing a beautiful

cantata. How is it you are able to sing that beautiful music so well? **(pause)** (We practice. We rehearse.) That is what Paul did as well.

Before he was seized Paul, “passed along, and observed objects of [their] worship. [He] found an altar with this inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore [they] worship[ed] as unknown, this [Paul] proclaim[ed] to [them].” (Acts 17:23) Paul had done his homework. Paul looked for ways to be prepared.

Paul was raised in the synagogue and had been taught the Scripture of the Old Testament from an early age. Paul continued studying the Law of Moses as an adult receiving instruction from the Pharisee the other Pharisees respected most, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Even when Paul is later arrested he continued to read pray and to sing God’s hymns of praise (Acts 16:25). There is no reason we can’t do the same. We can read God’s word a little every day for ourselves. We can sign up for Disciple I Bible study or Disciple II. We can join a Sunday school class or start a new Sunday school class. The children can take their faith in their own hands by participating in Confirmation this year. Surely, we can follow Paul’s example; if it will help us to share the gospel.

Paul was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 17:16). I am not going to ask you how many of y’all pray on a regular basis. Instead I am gonna ask how many of y’all do not answer your phone if the number of the person calling is a number you do not know? **(raise my hand)** How many of us would recognize the number if God called us on the telephone? Have we spent enough time in prayer to recognize when God is speaking to us and asking us to try something new? If it is going to help us reach more people for Jesus then I guess we could spend a little more time in prayer. At least enough so we can recognize when God calls us on the Spiritual caller I.D.; right?

Paul spent time with people he did not know in new places. Paul was not afraid to make new friends – outside of the church. Paul was a Jew from the city of Tarsus. Paul spent most of his time in ministry away from Tarsus. Even away from Jerusalem, everywhere Paul went he took the time to get to know the people. Paul was no mere tourist. Paul went to the market place, the synagogues and anywhere people gathered to pray. In Athens Paul observed the people and where they worshipped. Paul studied their poetry enough to offer the quote, “for we are indeed his offspring.” (Acts 17:28) Paul took time to get to know people before he began to preach to them the Gospel. We like people. We can make new friends. We can take a genuine interest in people. We can do that.

Having rehearsed by reading God’s Word, Praying so as to hear God’s voice, and taking time to get to know people when the opportunity to share the Gospel arrived, Paul was ready.

My sisters and brothers, do you want to see our church suffer? Do you want to waste time hating people for the things only we can change? Are we tired of playing the blame game and being angry? Are we ready to face our fears and do our homework so we might also hear the Voice of Truth? It is time for the story of our church to begin a new chapter. Today is the day to follow Paul’s example to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus name. Amen