

Spreading The Word: Person By Person Pleasant Plains 9-9-2018AM NICK ANGEL

- ***READ Acts 19:11-20*** During Paul's time in Ephesus, great success was being experienced for the purposes of the kingdom of God. Luke summarizes such successes by stating in **v.20**, *"So the Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."* If we take a moment to look at the specifics of what is happening in Ephesus then we will see that disciples of John are coming to Jesus (**Acts 19:1-7**), both Jews and Greeks are hearing the Word of the Lord (**Acts 19:10**), God is performing mighty deeds through the hands of Paul (**Acts 19:11,12**), the name of Jesus is being magnified (**Acts 19:17**), and many others are coming to put faith in Jesus and are putting away lives of sin (**Acts 19:18,19**).
- I don't know about you, but this seems like a very exciting time for the church with such great success being experienced by Paul and those others who were with him! It should create within us a desire to be able to experience the same sort of success, so it would be natural for us to ask what was being done that made Paul and these other disciples so successful.
- Some might look at what was being done and chalk it completely up to the fact that the Lord was working hand in hand with these disciples through miraculously means. They might say, *"How could anyone reject the Word when such great signs were being done?"* To us this might seem like a pretty reasonable conclusion, but we must recognize that miracles didn't always result in the faith of those who saw such things. John records in **John 12:37**, *"But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him."* Further, if miracles were the only way for these things to take place...well we would be up the creek without a paddle, so to speak.
- Therefore, I am convinced that the success being had by these disciples wasn't anything of a miraculous nature. Instead, I believe that this success was found because these disciples knew of God's expectations for them in regards to spreading His Word person by person. In **Matthew 18:18-20**, Jesus tells His Apostles to go into all the nations and make disciples. They were to teach these disciples everything that Jesus had taught them. What had Jesus just taught them? He had just taught them of their need to go and teach. Therefore, it can be understood that all disciples are to be about the business of teaching, and that which we are to teach is the Word of the Lord.
- This morning, we are going to look at three incredibly simple things that we all can do and need to do if we want to be busy fulfilling God's desire of spreading His Word to those around us. It was my friend Ben Lee who I first heard put forth these three simple steps, and they are so simple that even I myself can remember them long after hearing them for the first time. Now, Ben is a great disciple and a fantastic preacher, but he only put these three points together because they are first found within the Bible itself, and we'll see this morning that each of these things are found here within the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. With that all being said, let's begin considering how we can help for the Word to be spread so that it might continue to grow mightily and prevail even here in this place.

I. We must open our eyes.

A. The Apostles and earliest disciples were constantly on the lookout for opportunities for the Word of the Lord to be made known.

1. This is seen very early on in Luke's recordings of the actions of the Apostles and the early church. In **Acts 2:1-14**, we find Peter and the rest of the Apostles looking out and seeing an extremely large crowd that had gathered to see what all of the commotion was about when the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles.
2. In **Acts 4:1-4**, we find Peter and John coming upon a man who had been lame from his mother's womb. This man had a habit of positioning himself at the beautiful gate of the Temple. Peter and John see this man, and call upon him to turn his attention towards them.
3. Later on in the chapter after Peter and John interact with this man, we'll notice again that a crowd gathers around the Apostles and they are aware of such a thing happening. (**Acts 4:11,12**)

4. Paul also gets credit for being a man who had his eyes open looking for opportunities to spread the Word. We can see this in multiple places throughout Acts, but I want to highlight two that stand out the most to me and those two instances are found in **Acts 17:22,23** & **Acts 23:1-6**. In **Acts 17**, we find Paul in Athens and the text tells us that he has his eyes open and is aware that he is standing before a religious people. In **Acts 23**, Paul again has his eyes peeled and sees an opportunity to have a really important conversation with the Council that he was standing before.
- B. We need to be a people who have our eyes looking for opportunities to share the Word.**
1. What these examples show us is that as disciples of Jesus we ought to be very much aware of the situations that we find ourselves in in which we have opportunity to spread the Word. Unfortunately, Satan knows that this is what God desires of us. Therefore, he is busy at work trying to do everything he can to distract us from keeping our eyes open. It might be that spiritual things aren't all that important to us. We might simply be apathetic towards kingdom growth, and so we don't even look for opportunities we could take advantage of. It could also be that Satan seeks to keep us as busy as we can be so that we simply don't have time to look for those opportunities to spread the Word. Whatever the cause might be, if we are failing to keep our eyes open and peeled for these opportunities then we are failing to live up to God's expectations for what we ought to be doing as disciples.
 2. Let's therefore be aware and on the lookout for those times in which God's Word can be spread. Those times might present themselves in the form of people around us who are struggling or hurting in some way. Notice that Peter and John took note of the lame man who was in a desperate position. This not only turned into an opportunity for this man, but it also turned into an opportunity for the crowd that gathered around them. These opportunities could also present themselves in the form of religious people who we might judge to be misguided in their beliefs or understandings of the Scripture. This is what Paul saw because he had his eyes open looking for such opportunities in **Acts 17**. We would do well to keep our eyes open, aware, and looking for such opportunities for the Word to be spread, but the effort on our part doesn't end with just seeing the opportunities, but we must take advantage of such opportunities when we identify them.

II. We must open our mouths.

- A. We'll notice that the examples we have already looked at are followed up by the Apostles opening up their mouths and speaking needed words to those listening to them.**
1. We read in **Acts 2:14**, *"But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.'"* Peter saw this opportunity, and with some motivation from the Holy Spirit began to preach Jesus to this great multitude.
 2. In **Acts 3:11,12**, we find Peter again seeing a crowd gathered before him, and he doesn't waste an opportunity to say what needed to be said. *"While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people..."*
 3. We could even look to the text we began our assembly with of **Acts 19:1-7** and notice that Paul comes across some men who he finds out are disciples. However, in speaking with them he finds out that they were unaware of the Holy Spirit that had been given by Jesus upon His departure and the Apostles taking up the mantle of strengthening the Kingdom. Paul never would've known about their need for baptism in the name of Jesus if he had not opened his mouth and asked the important questions. Because of his efforts, these twelve men came to be a part of the body of Christ.

- B. We must be ready to not just spot opportunities for the Word to be spread, but we must also be ready to say what is necessary for such a thing to actually take place.
1. The actions of the Apostles need to serve as examples for us to emulate as we strive to do our part to spread the Word of the Lord. We have seen that they were not only looking for opportunities to spread the truth, but they were also ready to deliver that truth to those whom they judged had a need. Two questions: Are we willing to do the same thing? Are we able to do the same thing?
 2. The willingness on our part is similar to our willingness to even open our eyes and look for opportunities to spread the Word. If we don't care enough to open our eyes, then there is no way we will care enough to have those conversations that can sometimes be a bit uncomfortable. If we're being honest then we must admit that religious conversations can sometimes be pretty uncomfortable simply because there is a lot that hangs in the balance. Souls are at stake, and people can get pretty defensive when their beliefs are questioned. Are we willing to open our mouths and have those difficult conversations?
 3. If we are willing to do such a thing, then we must answer the next question as to whether or not we are even able to have such conversations. Do we have the necessary knowledge to speak with others about the Word? Have we put in the time and effort to know the truth well enough to be able to share it with others. Obviously both of these questions can we answer in the affirmative, but they demand that we care and give proper effort for them to be true about us as individuals. What is also necessary though...is that we are willing to open our mouths and speak about that which is truly necessary, and that which is necessary is that which can be found in God's Word. This means that we must not just open up our eyes and mouths, but it also means that we need to open up our Bibles.

III. We must open our Bibles.

- A. While the early disciples didn't have the Bible as we have such today, that didn't stop them from having the Word of God and truth as their main focus.
1. Notice that in **Acts 2**, Peter appealed to the Scriptures! Specifically he appealed to the writings of Joel and of David that can be found in **Joel 2:28-32** and **Psalms 16:8-11 & 132:11**. Peter's focus wasn't on presenting his own opinions...he was only concerning with sharing that which was true and could be shown as true from the Word itself.
 2. We see just how focused Peter was on sharing the truth of the Word in the next chapter when he and John come in contact with the lame man. We see that this man is at this place in order to beg for alms/charity. However, Peter and John see his condition, open their mouths, and share with this man something far better than some sort of money. They share with him the good news of Jesus and His power. *"When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"*" (**Acts 3:3-6**)
 3. Pau's concern was similarly only for the truth of God. When he spoke to the crowd gathered in Athens he spoke only of the one true God who was the creator of the whole world. Paul's entire speech in **Acts 17:22-31** is focused on sharing with those gathered the truth of God and not his opinions or thoughts. He knew that God's truth is that which saves, and he strongly desired for all to truly come to repentance and be saved. This reliance and insistence on considering the truth of God was Paul's MO. Earlier in the chapter we can see that it was Paul's custom to visit synagogues and open up the Scriptures so that he might discuss it's contents with those who would listen. This was how the Apostles operated nearly without exception.

B. We would do well to consider their example and follow it as best we can.

1. Though we see this clearly as the example set by the Apostles, we can sometimes be hesitant because we think of the Apostles as having abilities that we simply do not have. While it is true that they had miraculous abilities that we don't have, the truth is that they kept it kinda simple for the most part. Besides that however, let's notice an example of regular every day disciples who followed this same pattern.
2. In **Acts 18:24-26**, we read of Priscilla and Aquila following this same pattern of spreading God's Word. They happen upon a man named Apollos who the Scriptures tell us was a very learned man who was mighty in the Scriptures. Unfortunately, like the men of Ephesus, Apollos was only aware of the Baptism of John. He was not aware that the Scriptures had been fulfilled in Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila see this shortcoming, open their mouths, and begin to teach the Word of the Lord more accurately to Apollos. Just like the Apostles, these two disciples saw an opportunity, open their mouths, and taught the truth to someone who was in need.
3. This same pattern is the pattern that we can and need to follow in our efforts to spread the Word of the Lord. We look for opportunities, prepare ourselves to speak, and then only speak and teach that which we can show to be divine truth from God's Word. Any efforts on our part to teach our own opinions will only harm our efforts. If we cannot show them what we are teaching from God's Word then what true good are we doing? If we are trying to lead the people to be closer to God then we need to teach them only of God's will and truth. Opening the Scriptures will only help to ensure that it is God's will that is being taught, and that should be our foremost desire. We are to spread the Word and allow the Lord to give the increase.

We might sometimes look at the success of the disciples in the first century and wonder what magic formula we can replicate in order to have the same success, but the truth is that the formula if you want to call it that is quite simple. It's all about having a desire for spreading the Word and know that it can be spread through opening our eyes, mouths, and Bibles. The opportunities are all around us, we simply have to see them. Once we see them, we need to speak the needed truth, and that needs to be all that we speak. We need to simply speak the truth in love and allow God to bring the rest to fruition. If we will be busy about this business then we can have confidence that the fruit will come, and God will be glorified. May we be resolved to be about this work so that God's kingdom can be grown and strengthen in this play. May we each be resolved to be active in opening our eyes, our mouths, and our Bibles.