

## **Sharing the Faith**

### **Acts 3:26**

#### **Introduction**

Remember the mandate for the Early Church? Matthew 26:18-20

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

According to Acts 1:8 Jesus' followers were to wait for the promise of the Father before they embarked on this great commission. Christ knew they would need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be effective in changing their world. So were the early Christians effective in carrying out this mandate? The answer is YES! In fact, several thousand people came to Christ through their witness in the first few days! It is a testimony not only to the power of the Holy Spirit, but also to the disciples effectiveness in being his witness.

Today, I'd like for us to examine how they communicated the message about Christ. In Acts Chapter 2 and Acts Chapter 3 Luke records two successful examples that embody the key elements of effective witness. An effective witness begins with a demonstration of God's power.

#### **I. Sharing your faith means demonstrating God's power.**

In chapter 2 the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in unlearned languages. The languages that were spoken by those who were gathered together at the Feast of Pentecost.

In chapter 3, the Holy Spirit enables Peter to heal a paralytic (read 3:1-11). "Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, *being* the ninth *hour*. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John,

said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted *him* up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

Both of these events draw a crowd, and then Peter capitalizes on this to share a message. Wouldn't it be nice if we could begin every Christian meeting with authentic miracles? Well the fact is, we do have something very similar! We have the powerful testimony of God's power to change our lives!! The miracle of salvation is the greatest miracle of all? Your personal testimony is the most convincing display of God's power that attracts people to Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. A person has to consider Christianity when they see the change Jesus makes in you. The peace and joy that enters your life gives you a new freedom and a new sense of purpose. Your friends might not admit it to you, but they see it and it works on them. And when they are willing to admit they want to change, you are the one they know has the answer. Most of us are here today because we have seen a similar change in someone's life.

The change must be genuine. It needs to be an authentic change. Becoming a self-righteous, bible thumper is *not* what God has in mind. Jesus said the world will know we are Christians by our love. We actually love and enjoy people for who they are vs. using people or avoiding people. Sincere believers are not afraid or ashamed to be honest about their faults. And the reason we can be is because our weaknesses have been dealt with by God's grace. As believers in Jesus we don't need to be defensive or put up a false front. Even though we aren't perfect we are what we are in Christ, and Christ is changing us for the better every day! If you are a Christian and you are allowing the Lord to work in your life, people see a change in you!

## **II. Sharing your faith means giving the credit to Christ.**

When people were attracted by the power of God, Peter took the opportunity to talk about Jesus Christ. In Acts 2, they asked him for an explanation (2:12), and he answered by explaining that Jesus was responsible for what they had seen and heard (read 2:14-16, 32-33).

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

In Acts 3, Peter offers this explanation in verse 12: And when Peter saw *it*, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

Peter wasn't about to take credit for what happened. He gave the credit to Christ. Many people come to Christ without ever seeing a miracle, but no one has ever come to Christ without hearing the message! Regardless of what happens, we need to do what Peter did here—tell people about the difference Christ makes. Some people will actually ask why you're different, what's going on here, etc. (like the people in Acts 2). Others will be struck, but will not ask (like in Acts 3). They may be too shy to ask you about what they see in your life. So they will wait until you tell them the difference Christ has made in your life. Is it arrogant to give witness to your faith? It is arrogant not to give credit where it is due. Don't shy away from the supernatural explanation! People will assume a natural explanation unless you tell them differently. They need to know that it's the living Jesus Christ—and that he can do the same for them. This is what a “witness” is. We need to tell people what Jesus Christ has done in our lives.

### **III. Sharing your faith offers evidence for your belief in Jesus.**

In Acts 2:22-24. Peter explains what has happened with Jesus Christ. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Even when they put him to death, it couldn't hold him.

Then he goes into some Old Testament scriptures where David predicted the resurrection of the Messiah. He does the same thing in Chapter 3 offering evidence for his claims about Jesus. His claim was so extraordinary that he anticipated the need to supply evidence. It is the kind of evidence they would have appreciated because they were steeped in the Old Testament and believed it was God's Word.

We need to be ready to do the same thing when we share the amazing claim that Jesus Christ is alive and has changed our lives. People have questions and their questions deserve good answers. We can't simply insist people see things our way or write them off as hardened sinners. This is why Peter says 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:" The word translated "make a defense" is *apologia*, the word from which we get the term "apologetics"—the defense of the Christian faith. Out of love and respect for others (not to show off or "win the argument"), we need to have answers for people's questions. We need to be able to offer evidence that is helpful to the person we're talking with.

Christianity is unique in the area of predictive prophecy—both fulfilled (like Daniel 9, copies over 100 years before he came) and unfulfilled. There is also excellent historical evidence for Christianity, as well as rational and philosophical cases that Jesus is the way to God. Sometimes this is the key.

### **IV. God's grace. Sharing your faith should highlight**

We need to make it clear that God is loving, God is forgiving, and God wants to have a relationship with us. This is what Peter did.

In Acts 2:36-37 it says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

In spite of their part in Jesus' crucifixion, Peter tells them God is prepared to offer them an amazing gift. Verse 38. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." In spite of what they've done, God is still prepared to completely forgive them! He adds that God wants to live inside them, and give them eternal life (see 3:19-21). This is good news (gospel)—this is what arrests people and draws them. It's important to get this news out as soon as possible—because most people think the God of the Bible is only interested in judging them, not in forgiving them and having a relationship with them.

Some people think Christianity is all about keeping certain rules and having a judgmental attitude toward others. So we need to correct this misconception with the message of grace. God's Spirit will take the message and drive it into their hearts. And he's going to remind them of it when they are willing to admit their need.

## **V. Sharing your faith means explaining how to come to Christ.**

Notice also that Peter gives them specific instructions on what they need to do to receive this gift. This is also a key to being effective. People don't necessarily understand what they need to do, or that they need to do anything. On their own, they will rarely draw the right conclusion. "Repent" simply means to change your mind about living in alienation from God. It means to "turn back to God" (see 3:19). We need to personally speak to God and ask him for forgiveness and the gift of his Holy Spirit. "God wants to forgive you, and you can actually speak to him and he'll hear you . . ."

What about "and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins?" Baptism simply symbolized the cleansing of God's forgiveness which is mentioned next. It was particularly appropriate for these Jews, who were familiar with John's baptism which communicated the necessity of forgiveness for even God's chosen people. But it is not a requirement for salvation.

## **Conclusion**

This often causes a lot of irritation with non-Christians. They sometimes say, "Why don't the Christians keep their own beliefs to themselves like the rest of the world?" But when you have something this great, and find out that God is loving and personal, and that there's evidence that it's true—it's really selfish to keep it to yourself. So don't hold back – go out and share your faith!