

Good afternoon everyone, it is once again a privilege to open the word for you again, continuing on my two part sermon looking at apologetics, the art and science of explain what we believe and why we believe it. And we have been going through two sermons by Paul in the book of Acts, his sermon to the synagogue in Antioch Pisidian, in modern day Turkey, and in the Areopagus in Athens, in modern day Greece. And we used these two examples to apply to the two different groups that we Christians interact with in today's society. You have the church, the Bible-believers, those who have some part of Christianity right, and then you have the pagans, those who have never heard of anything to do with the Bible, God, Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. And when you hear me use that word pagan, don't assume I'm using it in a derogative or negative sense. G.K. Chesterton said of his friend and debate opponent George Bernard Shaw, an atheist and a socialist, that 'he is a pagan, and like many other pagans, he is a very fine man.'

So, we learned three key principles this morning, 1, that of respecting the image of God in your hearer, 2, building bridges of parts of truth that you can both agree on, and 3, we looked at the need to understand the values and presuppositions of the one who you are communicating the gospel too. So we will continue looking into these principles of communicating the gospel to help you explain and proclaim the truth faithfully and accurately, for the glory of God and the extension of His Kingdom.

I was talking with someone after the service this morning, who mentioned to me that conversation today in general, is decreasing. The world and social media has trained us to think with our emotions, so any conversation that makes you comfortable, you need to shut down. It is a threat to your inner peace. You don't like how pro-life advocates use the word child or baby when they speak of an unborn human? Cancel the conversation. Have you encountered this? Have you seen this play out in public discourse? We feel like we are living in a culture that just wants to shut down conversation, shut down dialogue, shut down freedom, shut down dissenting opinions. Well, I will reply to this with a quote from a book I am reading, ***“Christians, you are in the minority, and you need to start acting like it.”*** We should stop focusing on trying to dominate the conversation, and start just trying to be heard. I don't think it's a defeatist attitude at all. I think this is the attitude of those very first Apostles, taking the message of the gospel to the world.

That introduction aside, the first principle this afternoon and the fourth principle overall is speaking the right language. Speaking the right language. Turn to Acts 13 again. This is a very obvious and self evident truth here. Paul uses the same conventions and language that one would expect in a synagogue.

Verse 16, Paul stood up and motioned with his hand and said, Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

Paul follows the custom of the synagogue in order to be heard. And he continues, look down at verses 22. Is the last half of the verse there separated from the text or in a different font?

I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart.

That's the bible translator telling you that Paul is quoting from the Old Testament. And every verse Paul quotes is pulled straight out of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Scriptures the Jews would have read every Sabbath in the Greek speaking world they lived in. This is a very obvious point here.

And perhaps many of you have used this technique. If you encounter a group of people who only ever reads the King James Version of the bible, then you aren't going to be heard if you only only ever quote Scriptures from the NIV or the ESV. Its probably an unnecessary battle to fight. If they can only hear you when you speak with a KJV, then I would encourage you to do just that.

Have you also considered that your children will also need to be spoken to in the right language? Sadly, God doesn't automatically make saved children when two Christians have a baby, so we need to be ready even to give to our children an apologetic, an explanation why we believe the things we do and why we do the things we do. I have no doubt that some of the most difficult and thought provoking questions may probably be asked by your own children. To those who are expecting, or have young children, have you thought about how you can speak to your children and boil down the most important theological truths in a way that they can grasp. I was at a faithful brother's house recently, and his son asked before we ate 'Why do we thank God for the food?' *What a great question!* And an equally great opportunity to impress the truth from a young age. I was raised in a Christian home, and some of those same conversations shaped how I thought about the world for life, so I would encourage you to consider this deeply. We cant save our children, but we surely should give the Spirit every opportunity to work in the hearts of the children God has given us.

But have a look over the page at Acts 17, we find a similar situation. But instead of Paul using the language of a biblically literate Jew, he adopts the language and terminology of the Greek philosophers. My professor points out here that this sermon is a bit like the opening chapter of Genesis, describing the basic nature of who God is and who we are, and thus how we relate to him. And the language he uses speaks volumes to his audience. I mentioned this in the mornings sermon – look at verse 29, he uses the strange word 'Divine Nature', this impersonal force that was present in Greek understanding, to refer to the God of the bible. Another way Paul speaks their language is something that cant be seen in English translation, but in the Greek, Paul throughout the sermon employs what appears to be alliteration over and over again. This would have no doubt been an acceptable form of speech to these philosophers and poets, who, verse 21, used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.

Shai Linne, a pastor and part time rapper in the states would be an excellent comparative example of this, adopting a form of communication and using it to explain and articulate gospel truths. So I would encourage you not to despise things and ways of communication that you may not feel comfortable with. It is not sinful to adopt a method of communication that the world uses, nor is it right that we should force our audience into our mold of our cultural preferences of hearing truth. Would an Amish man use a telephone even if he used it to call his friend to explain the gospel to him? No he wouldn't, and this is an example of how a tradition

would prevent communication. So, one thing remains consistent, the Spirit works through the word, and the word comes through a preacher, a proclaimer of the word. And this can come in many forms. Do not despise methods that do not fit your cultural traditions.

Look down again at verses 30 and 31. God is now declaring that all men everywhere should repent, because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead."

Whats missing? Paul doesn't even mention the name Jesus! He is simplified to 'a Man!' What Paul is saying is true, Jesus was a man, and Jesus was resurrected, and he will judge all, but for some reason he sees it be be wiser to leave out his name. Perhaps he thought that they needed convincing of the reality of judgment and the resurrection before he introduced them to some more details about the identity of this man. I'm not entirely sure. But no doubt, it points to what we talked about this morning doesn't it. We don't have to give every single truth that you have ever learned every single time a spiritual conversation arises. Paul maybe holding back his pearls for future discussions.

What could be possibly confusing about Christianity when you explain it to someone who is part of the "unchurched?" What would you say if a teenager asks, 'Well, how does one become a Christian?' A robust orthodox reply would be, 'Faith in Jesus and repentance from sin. Faith and repentance. Is he likely to understand you correctly when you say the word 'Faith?' Think of the commonly used term 'a leap of faith' or 'step of faith'. Barrs notes that this means exactly the opposite of how the New Testament means it. A leap of faith is trusting in the impossible, stepping out and doing something difficult when you have no idea about how it will go or no reason to think it will succeed. So, if that is what this young person understands, we are asking him to trust and believe in Jesus, even when evidence or reason seems to suggest otherwise. That is not Christianity. It is not an unreasonable religion. Rather the contrast. Part of why we believe the promises of God is because every single promise God has kept. Part of the reason we believe Jesus rose from the dead was because hundreds of people saw him and testified about him. So in the New Testament, faith is not something that is irrational or unreasonable. So what would you say instead? Well, there are many right answers to how we would approach this problem, and I would love to hear how you confront this question after the service.

And this leads us naturally onto the next principle of communication, and that is reasoned persuasion. Reasoned persuasion. Aha, you've caught me. Matt, now we know you are making things up. Doesn't Paul say in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that 'Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.' And does he not say in verse 21 of the same chapter, that God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believed? Is not reasoned persuasion a technique of the world, and we should just "skip the mind and go straight for the heart?" So we should just present the facts, throw them out there, and see what sticks. "Here's Christ and him crucified, and if the Spirit works that's great, you don't need to give them evidence or reasoned argument. Is that how we should do apologetics and evangelism? Is that how Paul does apologetics and evangelism? I don't think so.

Firstly, I think the terms for foolishness and wisdom and clever speech in 1 Corinthians are relative terms. Compared to what the world thinks is wise, the gospel and the message of the Cross is foolish. But in God's eyes, the gospel is wisdom. And as God is God, he is the final determiner of truth and falsehood.

So let's look at Paul's use of reasoned persuasion in his sermon in Acts 13. From the numerous times we have read over this passage, what are the main reasons Paul puts forward to believe that the Messiah is Jesus?

In verse 25, he appeals to what John the Baptist said – someone is coming after me who is the messiah. Then in verse 30 and 31, Paul appeals to *living witnesses* of God raising Jesus from the dead, verse 31 'for many days he appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee and Jerusalem.' Then he quotes how Jesus' resurrection is foretold in the Old Testament, namely the most famous in verse 35, You will not allow your holy one to undergo decay.

Paul is not afraid to reason using the evidences that the Jewish people would find compelling to point toward Jesus. Does this negate the work of the Spirit? By no means. Acts 9:20-22 states 'But Paul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.' Paul was not afraid to prove Jesus was the messiah, and nor should we.

What about in Acts 17, the sermon to the pagans? Turn the pages, and look through the sermon, How does Paul reason here? He reasons from common knowledge. Common knowledge known by every human being that is known by virtue of them being a human being. He argues that we know God made the world, and that He exists, that Paul knows they depend on God for their life and breath, verse 25, he argues that humans are related to God in some way, there is something about us greater than the animals, verse 28, and even that idolatry is self-evidently foolish, verse 29. In fact, Paul quotes their own poets and prophets to show the Athenians that even their own wise men recognize this.

Paul is not afraid to use reasoned persuasion with the Jews or the pagans, and we should not shy away from it in our own encounters. But do then we need to be a sharp, fast thinking lawyer to be an apologist of the Christian faith? *Pause* By no means. Yes, you should spend your time reasoning with someone, and spend the time to read and learn what other arguments Christians have used, but, remember - even if you provide an absolute water tight case, the best argument and reason in the world, even if you could somehow with 100% certainly show the empty tomb, or the remnants of Noah's Ark, or part of King David's crown, or a lock of Samson's hair – without the supernatural regenerating work of the spirit of God, they will still not believe. My focus of these two sermons is to give you some helpful principles, some methodologies to more faithfully communicate truth – but no results are guaranteed, we are called to be faithful witnesses and ambassadors of the truth in our lives, speech and conduct. But we, in and of ourselves cannot save anyone.

Barrs adds to this principle of persuasion, and mentions that it can **take time** to reasonably persuade your hearer. Notice the conclusion of both sermons.

Acts 13:42, 'As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things may be spoken to them the next Sabbath.'

And again in Acts 17:32, 'Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said 'We shall hear you again concerning this.'

Notice evangelism can be a slow process. As you learn more and more about their worldview, you can continue to challenge and shape and craft your answers as you go along. Yes, sometimes the Holy spirit can convict someone and grant them faith right there and then, but for the most part, its usually a long and slow process of a thousand conversations. Think about your own conversion. Was it the result of one out-of-the-blue conversation? Or was God slowly morphing and changing your perceptions and beliefs towards finally embracing the gospel? You could have been like the Jews here at Pisidan Antioch, and couldn't get your questions answered fast enough, as they begged Paul and Barnabas to return. "This Jesus guy sounds right, but I have so many unanswered questions! What about the kingdom the messiah is promised, what about the conquering of the Romans? What about what about what about...there are some who will embrace the gospel quickly.

Sometimes, they may not be ready to hear the gospel. In pagan Athens, some began to sneer. "What is this nonsense. What is this rubbish about the resurrection of the dead!?" Jerram Barrs sees this as a challenge of our belief that it is God who saves, not us. Yes, we are the means, but ultimately we cant change the heart. Could you leave a conversation if you sensed that there is no way they would hear the truths you offered them? I remember the dread I felt when I push and pushed someone, kept forcing the gospel again and again, for her then to turn around and to say, "I never want you to talk to me about this stuff again." What made it awkward was we were stuck on a remote exploration site for 3 weeks together. I just didn't recognize the slow process that sometimes God uses for the conversion of his people. And God can and God does use multiple people, over multiple conversations over multiple years.

Look at Jesus' half brother James. He didn't have a good relationship with his half-brother Jesus did he? His brothers are never really with Jesus throughout his ministry, and don't even appear to be at Jerusalem at his crucifixion. James appears to have shunned the best apologist, and missed the best proclamations of the gospel the world has ever heard. But where is he 20 years after his death? Well, he is leading the church in Jerusalem which you can read about in Acts 15. You may not see the fruit of your witness, but you may used providentially as one of 1,000 conversations to lead someone to salvation.

The last and final principle I am going to leave with you this afternoon is that of the clarification of the truth. Everything else we have covered so far is more oriented to your audience, the friend or coworker who you are conversing with. We have been learning how to accommodate our message to their traditions and backgrounds and presuppositions in order to gain a hearing before them. Now we must ensure that we can be ready to faithfully present the truth when this occurs.

I recall a time at university when I was discussing with my flatmates some spiritual things. I had been very outspokenly critical of the many things I observed was wrong in others worldviews, and finally my friend who was an atheist turned to me and asked what I believed. The room fell silent and I had the floor. I almost froze, and I eventually spoke timidly and without conviction, as pretty much my entire Christianity at the point consisted of what I did not believe and agree with, rather than being able to positively state what I did.

Let's have a look one final time at Acts 13. How does Paul clarify the good news to his hearers? Barrs notes that Paul by giving such a long and drawn out introduction, he is whetting the appetite of their desires. You believe the Scriptures? Well, the Scriptures point to Jesus! You believe in a coming Messiah, well, the Messiah is Jesus! You honor John the Baptist as a prophet, John the Baptist says to honor Jesus! Read verse 38 and 39 with me, it is a great conclusion of the sermon.

Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him (through Jesus) forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

Here is the good news clarified to the Jews. Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, Jesus is the one who frees us from the law of bondage of law keeping as a way to earn eternal life.

And do the Christian-based cults and groups come away with this truth in their mind after talking with you? Does the Roman Catholic hear about freedom from having to earn God's favour? Almost every Christian based cult has made two key errors, and end up very similar to what the first century Jews believe in many cases. They make mistakes around the person of Christ, and the way of salvation. Are you able to compellingly present the gospel, offering this taste of freedom? If you speak to a workmate with nominal Christian past, do they hear rules, and laws, and religious rituals as the essence of our faith, or do they hear Christ crucified, and through him is the free offer of eternal life, forgiveness of sins and freedom from working your way to God's favor? What about the JW, or the Mormon, will they hear the forgiveness of sins and freedom from the law? Will you be ready to clearly describe it if you have the chance?

I do not often set homework in a sermon, but perhaps you could do this if you have a spare 15 minutes sometime this week. Answer this question – what is the gospel? *Pause* Think about it, and write it down on a piece of paper. Different things work for different people, but sometimes writing it down can force you to formulate and order your thoughts. So this could be one way of ordering in your mind the key aspects of the gospel that you can be ready to share if the Lord providentially puts you in that situation.

Turn and let's have a last look at Acts 17. What is Paul's gospel message to the pagans? Shouldn't it be the same? Rather than Old Testament Scripture, Paul has been appealing to the basic, universal human truths, and he concludes that the Athenians – you know that God exists so much that you build an altar to him, and call him the unknown God! Your own poets and prophets testify about him. So how do we know more about him – well, he has revealed himself fully in a person. Read verse 30 and 31 with me.

Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring that all people everywhere should repent, because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a man whom he has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead.'

You know God exists? Even better, I can tell you who he is. And he has spoken, and said 'repent', turn from sin, and believe in this man who God has appointed as judge. The longings of your heart to worship and honor the Giver and Sustainer of life can be satisfied in this same one who will judge the world in righteousness. "Athenians, you are right in saying God is not far from us, well I can tell you this God can be accessible through this man Jesus who has been raised from the dead! The natural, universal longings of the human heart will find their rest in the truth of the gospel.

Let us conclude. We have looked at how Paul in two sermons to two very different groups of people uses some ways of communication to best allow his message to be heard and received. And we also were reminded that this is not only a task for the elder, the pastor, the lawyer, but everyone. For the ordinary Christian. And this is the way God has worked for 2,000 years, so I'd encourage you to not fear nor shy away from the task at hand.

Christian, you are in the minority, act like it. **Be heard.**

Respect your hearer, build a bridge, understand where they come from, speak their language, argue persuasively, present a clear and easily digestible message. And it goes without saying to live, act and speak in a way that adorns the gospel, rather than distract from it. The Spirit is living and active, constantly providentially weaving people in and out of interactions and conversations, saving a people to worship and serve their Creator. Pray for those you interact with, beg God to work in their hearts. And continue to faithfully give an apologetic, an answer, for what you believe about the gospel, and the reasons we you believe it.

Let us pray.