

February 25, 2024
As You Are Going: Opportunities
Acts 3:11-26
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro...theme

We're going to talk about when God gives us opportunities to share this morning. I find it interesting that in last week's text we read that "Peter and John were going to the temple..." As Pastor Bruce mentioned last week, it says the man was begging at the gate daily and so on this particular day God gave the Peter and John an opportunity. And we know what happened as we read last week that Peter and John healed this man who had been lame since birth in the name and power of Jesus.

When thinking about this, it reminded me of one of my favorite stories to tell of a missionary friend in India. He was traveling around in a remote area of India doing pastoral training for pastors and church planters when he entered into a small and remote village, and once the people found out he was a "holy man," they asked him to come and pray for a family that was in desperate need. He agreed and followed the people to a house and was led through the house and into a back yard area with a "shed like" structure. He was thinking to himself that whoever they were asking him to pray for was really sick and they had brought them back here because of the fear that whatever sickness they had would spread to others in the village. By this time a crowd had gathered and had even climbed up on top of the walls surrounding this yard. When they opened the door to this shed, he discovered that it wasn't a person at all, but it was the family's one and only cow that was dying. Now, as many of you know, in the Indian culture cows are sacred, but in a real practical sense, this was the family's only cow that provided milk for them, and many others who couldn't afford their own, and if it died they couldn't afford another one. And so they were asking him to pray, and heal, their cow. My friend looked around and saw the crowd and new that he had to do something and so he agreed, laid his hands on the cow and began to pray. As he was praying, he could hear murmurs in the crowd and he thought that they were snickering at the sight of this "Christian Holy Man" praying for this cow to be healed. But what he didn't realize was that murmurs were from those who were gasping in amazement at what they were seeing because as he was praying the cow began to move and eventually stood up and began to eat, something it hadn't done in several days. The people couldn't believe it and provided an opportunity for my friend to share the Gospel and many in the village gave their lives to Christ.

Now, that's awesome, but my favorite part of the story came several weeks later. At another conference where my friend was doing some more pastoral training, he ran into one of the local pastors from the area where this story took place. Curious as to what had been happening, he asked, half-way jokingly, "How is that cow doing?" To his surprise, the pastor nonchalantly said, "Oh, it died." My friend was filled with worry as he considered what this would mean for the faith of these new believers. He thought, "Would they think it was all a gimmick and walk away?" Then the other pastor reassured my friend that their faith was strong and their exact words were, "it is just a cow, God will provide another one for us."

I've never been asked to pray for a cow in a remote village in India surrounded by a crowd of people, but God has given me plenty of opportunities to share with others who God is and what he has done in my life. We all have whether we realize it or not. We are given

countless opportunities on a daily basis to share the Gospel. The question we need to ask ourselves is, do we take advantage of those opportunities or do we miss them because we are too busy with our own lives to give consideration to the eternal destiny of others? The real question is are we even looking for them?

I'd love to stand up here in front of you today and tell you about all the success stories I've had telling others about Jesus. About how I had all the courage to speak up and had all the right words to say that God used to bring people to himself. Praise God that there have been a few. I've had times where the opportunity has presented itself and I have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and shared the good news of Jesus.

But, far too often, I've had many other opportunities to tell people about Jesus that I just missed completely or I could not think fast enough to figure out what to say. And about an hour later, or late at night as I lie awake, I think of all the things that I could have said, or should have said, but by then the opportunity is gone. I don't know, maybe that's never happened to you. But if you're like me, then we all could use some instruction on how to share the gospel when God gives us the opportunity. What should we make sure we include when given the opportunity to offer God's salvation to someone who is lost? Well, I believe Peter's second sermon in Acts gives us some help, some pointers if you will, in this area. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the Word of God. [Read Passage]

Last week we saw that God had used Peter and John to heal a man who had been lame from birth by the Beautiful Gate entrance to the Temple. A crowd quickly gathered, amazed at what had happened, and Peter delivered a sermon that God used to save, at least, another 2,000 people as we'll see next week in ch.4. All this took place in the area known as Solomon's Portico or Solomon's Porch. [Picture] In this sermon, Peter emphasized three truths that we must emphasize if we want to proclaim the gospel when given the opportunity.

The first truth, and probably most important, when given the opportunity to share the Gospel we must exalt the Lord Jesus. The word exalt means to "lift up" or to "glorify." Peter's sermon is full of the Lord Jesus as we'll see. People must consider the question, "Who is Jesus?" Was he simply a man who had some good moral teachings? If so, then people are free to pick and choose whichever of his teachings they prefer and to reject the others. Many people, even those who would describe themselves as "Christian," while not saying it out loud, live their lives as if not all the teachings of Jesus apply to them or are relevant for today. But, if Jesus is who he claimed to be, both Savior and Lord, who was prophesied of in the Old Testament, crucified in accordance with God's plan, but risen from the dead as He predicted, then He is also the coming Judge of the whole earth. And if that is true, then this Jesus imposes some inescapable claims on every person. People may reject him or they may choose to follow him. That is between them and God. But when sharing the Gospel everything hinges on exalting the person of Jesus.

How do we do this? How do we exalt Jesus? We first must deflect any glory away from us and towards him. Notice that Peter begins his sermon by deflecting the glory for the miracle away from himself and John, as if they had either the "power or piety" to make a lame man walk as he states in vs. 12. What Peter was saying is that the power to heal this man did not come from them. Nor was it because they were better than anyone else. The word translated "piety" comes from the Greek word that means, "devotion," or "reverence." In others words, it wasn't even their devotion that somehow forced God's hand to heal. It was through faith in Jesus, and him alone, that the man was healed and if God uses us to do a work in another person's life it is not because of anything in us. We are just the vessels, or channels as we have been singing in our

closing song, that God uses for His own purposes. To take any credit for anything that God does through us is to rob him of the glory and to exalt ourselves.

We also exalt Jesus, and this one seems obvious, when we tell others about him, namely, who he is and what he has done. In our text, Peter uses numerous titles here to tell his audience who Jesus is and they are all summed up in the phrase, “the name of Jesus” that we read in vs. 16. This is a call back to 3:6, when Peter said to the lame man, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk,” and he’s saying here in our passage that this man was healed on the basis of faith in the name of Jesus, and it is the name of Jesus “which has made this man strong whom you see and know.” Richard Longenecker said this in his commentary on this passage, “In Jewish thought, a name does not just identify or distinguish a person, it expresses the very nature of his being. Hence the power of the person is present and available in the name of the person.” We see this throughout the Bible in which we are not only given the names of the people what the meaning of the name is as well. So, it’s not an arbitrary thing that Luke records Peter’s words this way. When we pray in Jesus’ name we are praying in the power of everything that Jesus is, namely, the Son of God and through this power nothing is impossible.

Let’s look at all the ways Peter describes who Jesus is in our passage. Remember, he’s speaking to a predominately Jewish crowd and so he makes a lot of connections to the OT. As we look further into the Book of Acts, in ch. 17, there we see the Apostle Paul addressing a predominately Greek audience in Athens and he uses different tactics. It’s important to know who we are talking to in order to know how to share Jesus in a way that will make sense to them.

Peter describes Jesus as the Servant of “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” in vs. 13. This same word “servant” is used in Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where the prophet speaks of the coming “suffering servant” who would be “pierced through for our transgressions” and that the Lord would cause “the iniquity, or wickedness, of us all to fall on Him.”

Peter also refers Jesus “the Holy and Righteous One” in vs. 14. The Bible tells us that Jesus was without sin. Therefore, He could offer Himself as the substitute for sinners, without needing to make atonement for His own sins. Only God is truly holy and righteous. In his first sermon at Pentecost that we looked at a few weeks ago, Peter quoted from Psalm 16:10, where David declares that God will not allow His Holy One to see decay or corruption, making the connection that Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophesy and everything the Jews were supposed to be looking for.

Peter also refers to Jesus as “the Author of life” in vs. 15. The word “author” here means the “leader” or the “originator.” The same word is used in Hebrews 2:10, where Jesus is called “the author of salvation,” and in Hebrews 12:2, where He is called “the author and perfecter of our faith.” He originates our salvation and our faith and He brings it to completion. As the Author of life, He originates life, both physical and spiritual. He declared that he is “the way, the truth, and the life in John 14:6. He also said in John 5:21, “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He will.”

Peter refers to Jesus as God’s Christ, appointed for you in vs. 18 and 20. Jesus was not a self-appointed Christ. God appointed Him as His Anointed One, meaning his “Messiah” or “promised one.” As such, He fulfills the many Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Speaking of such, Peter goes on in v. 22 to show that Jesus is also the prophet whom Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers, it is to him you shall listen.” Not only that, Jesus was the one of whom all the prophets, from Samuel onward, had spoken in vs. 24.

Furthermore, Jesus is the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in vs. 25 and he concludes in vs. 26 by stating again that Jesus is God's Servant, whom He raised up and sent to bless them by turning them from their wicked ways. Thus Peter, in relating to his Jewish audience, attempted to show who Jesus is, that he is the realization of God's promises to Abraham, Moses, and David.

When we are given the opportunity to share the gospel, we must keep in mind this simple truth. Yes we can attempt to answer all of their questions or even their objections, but at the end of the day, the person we are talking to needs to see who Jesus is. The main thing is to bring the person face to face with Jesus.

Not only are we to tell people about who Jesus is but we must also tell people what Jesus has done. Peter makes it clear in his sermon that Jesus died on the cross and the cross of Christ is foundational to the Gospel message. Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:18 that, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The cross humbles our pride, because it robs us of the glory of being our own savior. It also humbles us by showing that we aren't pretty good people who just need a little boost from God to get into heaven. If we were, then Christ died nothing. No, the truth is without the cross, we are lost sinners, alienated from God and unable to do anything to save ourselves. And if Christ had not died for us, we would be eternally lost.

And not only did he die on the cross, but he was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven for it was impossible for the grave to hold down "the Author of life." Peter testifies that God raised Him from the dead, "a fact to which we are witnesses" in vs. 15. The fact that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead is the central truth of Christianity, without which everything else falls apart which the Apostle Paul makes the case for 1 Cor. 15:17 when he says, "If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then your faith is useless and you are still in your sins."

But he has been raised from the dead and this same Jesus, as we read in Acts 1, is coming back again to fulfill God's promises and to judge all who have rejected Him. Peter makes this very clear when he says in vs. 23, "When he comes, "every soul that does not listen to that prophet, [Jesus] shall be destroyed from the people." He will come again as the Savior of those who believe in Him, but as the fearful Judge of those who reject him.

So, when given the opportunity to share the Gospel we must exalt the name of Jesus, telling people who he is and what he did, namely that he died on the cross for sin, but he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven giving the opportunity for all who will come to him to be saved if they repent, until the day when he comes again in glory to establish his kingdom with those who have believed on his name for salvation and to judge and cast out and destroy all those who rejected his free offer of salvation.

Now these next few points will be shorter because they flow out of the truth of the first, but the second truth that Peter emphasized in his sermon is that when we are given the opportunity to share the Gospel, we must confront people with their guilt before God and warn them of the coming judgment. To only share who Jesus is and what he has done without mentioning our guilt before God and our need of a savior is to present an incomplete Gospel. It allows people to get comfortable in the "love of Jesus" without having to make any changes in how they live their lives or who they live their lives for.

As he did in his first sermon at Pentecost, Peter confronts the crowd in vs. 13 with their guilt for delivering over and denying Jesus when Pilate would have released him. And he repeats the phrase again in vs. 14-15 with an emphatic "You," "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God

raised from the dead.” He is showing how they not only did an evil thing but that they were in opposition to God Himself.

Unlike Peter, far too often, we try to tiptoe around the matter of sin and guilt. It’s easier to share the love of Jesus and not mention his justice at all. We don’t want to offend people. But if we omit our sin and guilt from the equation, there is no need for a Savior! Jesus didn’t die on the cross for pretty good folks so that they could feel better about themselves and to help them succeed in life. He died for them because they are sinners who are under God’s wrath and judgment. Without a Savior, they face both physical death and the second death, eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire as described in Rev. 20:15. We have not adequately presented the good news of Christ as Savior unless we confront people with the bad news, if they do not repent, they will face God’s certain and awful judgment.

But, thankfully, there is good news, and there is a final truth that we must include to proclaim the gospel, when given the opportunity we must offer God’s grace to the guilty, not as a solution to their guilt before God, but as the solution. After Peter’s indictment of his audience he doesn’t walk off and leave them. But rather, he exhorts and pleads with them in vs. 19-20, “Repent and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” And he tells them in vs. 26 that God sent His Servant Jesus “to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.” God offers forgiveness to those who repent. And if God is so gracious as to offer forgiveness and His kingdom blessings to those who crucified His Son, then surely, he offers grace to every sinner who will repent.

And what is repentance? As we stated a few weeks ago, it is not simply feeling sorry for what we have done, but it is a change of mind that results in a change of one’s entire life. It means to turn from our sin and to God.

So, whenever you get an opportunity to share the gospel with someone, seek to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner needs to know who Jesus is and what he done. Don’t hesitate, out of fear of giving offense, to confront people with their sin and warn him of the coming judgment. People need to feel their guilt so that they realize their need of a Savior. But, don’t fail to offer God’s grace and forgiveness to everyone who will repent. And whether God uses you to save 2,000 people, as He did with Peter’s sermon we read today, or maybe just one, realize that salvation is the work of the Lord, we are just his vessels to bring the message of his gospel to those who desperately need it. So, as we are going about our daily lives, let us keep our eyes open for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with others. In other words, as we are going let’s be the church on mission. Let’s pray.