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Editorial on Evangelism

Last month I started to focus the editorial article on the subject of evangelism. As many of you know, it's a subject that is close to my heart. I'll be developing this in the next few issues. This quarter I'll be brief, as we are finishing the 'Studying and Preaching with a Tablet' series with two articles wrapped into one. Stephen Grant and Jeremy Singer continue with their series, and Paul Coxall completes his articles on Psalm 139. We really appreciate Paul doing this as he has not been well and has written the last article between his regular visits to hospital; please remember him in your prayers.

The Prime Motivation for Evangelism - Obedience

At the end of Mark 16, we discover that the disciples obeyed the Lord's instruction, and He blessed their work. We need to have courage to do what the Lord tells us to do. The Lord still works with those who serve Him. We cannot guarantee when souls will be saved but Psalm 126 verse 6 promises that we will see results, one day!

Luke's description of these final moments in the life of the Lord Jesus on earth includes conversations with individuals who are not identified as being part of 'the Eleven'. The term 'the Eleven' describes the apostles after Judas had taken his own life. In verse 9 of Luke 24, a group of people are simply described as being 'all the rest'. Verse 13 sees the start of the famous 'road to Emmaus' incident. One of the two individuals is identified as Cleopas, while the other person remains unidentified. Many have theories about who they were, but what we can be quite sure of is that they were not of the 'eleven'! Let's continue with the story. After the Lord reveals himself to them, they rush back to Jerusalem and find 'the eleven gathered together, and those that were with them'. As they are explaining what took place on their journey home, the Lord comes into the room. Once again, He teaches them what scripture says about Himself, and He opens their understanding 'that they might understand the scriptures'. I must stop and comment - what an amazing occasion that must have been! Can you imagine listening to the risen Lord explain the full meaning of the biblical prophecies that related

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to Him – awesome in the extreme! Hard on the heels of this teaching, the Lord tells all of those gathered in the room that day, “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’. They are challenged by the Lord to be His witnesses, as they have had first-hand experience of the events surrounding the cross and the resurrection. My main point here is not just that the gospel message was to be communicated, but that it

was to be communicated by all followers of Christ, not just the select group of ‘the Eleven’. Will we take up the challenge in our day!

Stephen Baker



PSALM 139. 19-24

Devoted to God

BY R. SCOTT THOMSON USA

The testimony of God concerning David was, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will’, Acts 13. 22. What a testimony from God! The Lord knew David’s innermost thoughts and motives. He had examined him and found one who had a desire to obey. He found in David someone who had a devoted heart. David experienced failure, but the pattern of his life was an increasing love for God.

His meditations gave him a greater appreciation of:

- God’s omniscience - there is nothing He does not know;
- God’s omnipresence - there is nowhere He is not present; and
- God’s omnipotence - there is nothing He cannot do, if He chooses.

This last statement is qualified by the fact that there are some things that God cannot do, i.e., lie, sin, deny Himself, etc.

Uncomfortable reading?

In this last section of Psalm 139 we find some verses that on first reading may make the 21st century reader uncomfortable. There is talk of David slaying, loathing and hating enemies, Ps. 139. 21 . Should thoughts or words like this have

any place in a man who has a heart like God? After all, the Bible does tell us to ‘Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you’, Luke 6. 27. Yet David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, could also speak about God and write, ‘you hate all evildoers’, Ps. 5. 5 ESV, and ‘God is angry with the wicked every day’, 7. 11 NKJV.

How should we understand God’s love for sinners, John 3. 16, and His hatred of them? Such are the perfections of God that we can never fully understand these things. However, we do know that God’s love cannot be isolated from His wrath. His wrath perfectly co-exists with His love, and both attributes are constant and perfect.

Look at David’s deep loyalty to God.

He was not asking God to slay his own enemies, but God’s enemies, v. 20. He was not concerned with those who spoke maliciously against him, but those who spoke against God, v. 20. In verse 21, David states that he hated those who hated God, and rebelled against Him. David’s words show that he had a deep love for God. His delight in God meant that he recoiled from those who lived in rebellion against Him. He was extremely concerned that God should be honoured and loved by all men.

How do you react when God is defamed?

How do you respond when people who claim to represent God perform actions that are opposed to God? David was grieved when he witnessed such incidents. He could not remain silent, but came to God in prayer. The response of David is a challenge to every believer. In the 21st Century, the media is full of interviews with people who want to put their side of a story across. The interviewee will want to be portrayed in a good light so that people think well of them. We too can be easily offended if people misrepresent our words, speak falsely about our character, or commit deeds in our name that are repulsive to us. Undoubtedly, we are outraged, and maybe we take immediate action to ensure as many people as possible know the truth. Yet, when the name of God is misused we remain silent.

If you are more offended when you are misrepresented than when God is, you should ask yourself, 'Who do I love most?'

How do you react when God is defamed?

The zeal of David for God's name is similar to that of the Apostle Paul. If anyone misrepresented God by preaching a 'different gospel', he said, 'let him be accursed', Gal. 1. 9. He used the same word 'accursed', which means 'devoted to destruction', when speaking of those who had no love for the Lord Jesus Christ: 'If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed', 1 Cor. 16. 22 NKJV.

Of course, the person who was most concerned that God be represented truthfully was the Lord Jesus Christ. We can remember the incident in John chapter 2 when He saw the temple of God being abused. Jesus would not tolerate disrespect

towards God. The money changers had their tables overturned and were driven out with a cord of whips. The disciples recalled the words, 'Zeal for your house will consume me' ESV, and applied them to the Lord, as He was totally consumed with a zeal for the things of God.

How about praying like David?

Such was David's devotion to God he uttered a prayer, vv. 23-24, that would be suitable for every believer. His words should be read and considered by all. David knew that he did not know his own thoughts and motives as well as God did. He wanted God to reveal to him any sin that was in his life, so that he could deal with it.

David's sincere prayer could only come from a heart that loved God and wanted to please Him. His longing for greater intimacy with God was the root of his prayer. His desire for practical holiness in every area of his life meant that he prayed these words.

Challenge: Read the whole of Psalm 139 carefully, meditate upon the words, and then respond to God in a prayer that reflects your meditation.



SELF-DENIAL

EGO (2)

BY **STEPHEN GRANT BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND**



Despite the undeniably strong emphasis in the Bible upon the blessings of salvation, the gospel is essentially a call to self-denial rather than self-fulfillment.

'Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess everything, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive. Let me find Thy light in my darkness, Thy joy in my sorrow, Thy grace in my sin, Thy riches in my poverty, Thy glory in my valley, Thy life in my death'. Old Puritan Prayer¹

The Lord Jesus taught this great truth to His disciples using the evocative language of crucifixion. He asked them a question, 'Who do men say that I the Son of man am?' Matt. 16. 13, with the follow up question, 'But whom say ye that I am?' v. 15. Peter gave his great confession as he spoke for the other disciples, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', Matt. 16. 16 NKJV. Peter is then told that the Lord would build His church. It was heady stuff, and the moment for which they had all been waiting. It is in that context that the Lord gave them instruction that must have been hard to understand and bear.

'When he had called the people unto him with His disciples also, he said unto them, Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me', Mark 8. 34.

To deny is to disown and refuse association. He is saying to His disciples, if you want to follow Me then you have to refuse to associate with yourselves. You have to see yourself as God sees you in all your failure and sin. This is what happens when we are saved as we come to God in repentance and faith. Sadly, we often lose that sense of our unworthiness and dependence upon grace, and begin to think selfishly.

What does it mean to deny yourself? I have not read or heard a better description than that which American Bible teacher John MacArthur gave in a sermon on the subject:

'When you're not forgiven, or neglected, or purposely set aside and you sting and hurt with the insult or oversight, but your heart is happy and you're content to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that's dying to self.

When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice is disregarded, your opinions are ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loyal silence, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any annoyance, when you can stand face-to-face with foolishness, extravagance, spiritual insensitivity and endure it as Jesus endured it, that is dying to self.

When you're content with any food, any offering, any clothes, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self.

When you never care to refer to yourself or to record your own good works, or seek commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self.

When you see another brother prosper and have his needs met and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy, nor even question God while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, that is dying to self'.²

This could never be considered a natural outlook, and can only be possible when we remember what the Bible teaches about being crucified with Christ.

¹ *Valley of Vision*, a Puritan Book compiled by ARTHUR BENNETT

² *The Necessary Components of Saving Faith*, a sermon by JOHN MACARTHUR



CONTENT?

ADVENTURES IN ACTS

Evangelistic Exploits - Acts 13-14

BY JEREMY SINGER BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

Introduction

Paul's first missionary journey was a large circuit, covering over one thousand miles. The evangelical explorers traversed the island of Cyprus and visited major cities in the Roman province of Galatia (modern-day central Turkey). Let's consider this mission and see how we can draw principles for evangelism today.

Henry Martyn, an 18th century English missionary, said, 'The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of missions'. We see gospel oriented Christianity in our passage. Paul and Barnabas are taking the gospel to places 'where the name of Christ has never been heard', Rom. 15. 20 NLT.

A Gospel-focused church

The missionary journey begins at Antioch. There is great *diversity* in this congregation, including five men with contrasting backgrounds, Acts 13. 1. There is a lot of *activity* in Antioch. A variety of prophetic and teaching gift is in evidence, v. 1. The equivalent English word for this service is *liturgy*, v. 2, indicating its priestly nature. The local church shows *sensitivity*, hearing the Holy Spirit's command, v. 2, and responds immediately, v. 3. The believers are prepared to let Barnabas and Saul leave, sacrificing the potential benefits of their fellowship at Antioch. However, the church does not forget these missionaries. Notice how the believers retain an interest in the mission, from the initial prayer meeting, v. 3, to the final report meeting, 14. 27.

There are two lessons for us:

1. Don't be discouraged when people leave a local church to work elsewhere. The testimony at home will continue.
2. Missionaries are guided by the Holy Spirit and are not subject to day to day management by the local church.

A Gospel-focused team

This is not a one-man mission. Barnabas and Saul are the nominated missionaries, 13. 2. John Mark is their 'minister', v. 5. So there are at least three members of the 'company', 13. 13. Paul always works with other believers, such as 'those women which laboured with [Paul] in the gospel', Phil. 4. 3. Most importantly, the mission is not about any human leader or representative. As Paul reminds the Colossians: 'That in all things he [Christ] might have the pre-eminence', Col. 1. 18.

Barnabas demonstrates *humility*. Although he has been a believer for longer than the others, he is ready to take a less noticeable role among 'Paul and his company', Acts 13. 13. SPURGEON¹ wrote: 'It needs more skill than I can tell, to play the second fiddle well'. Barnabas displays this gracious humility. For instance, he maintains a dignified and supportive silence at Lystra, 14. 12, while Paul preaches.

John Mark intends to *help*, 13. 5. He was probably a younger man, Col. 4. 10. However, he was unable to stay the course, Acts 13. 13. BARCLAY² quotes CHRYSOSTOM,

suggesting ‘the lad wanted his mother’. Whatever the reason, Mark deserts the team. We are encouraged to learn of a subsequent restoration to Paul, 2 Tim. 4. 11. Despite past failures, we can be recommissioned by God for useful service.

A Gospel-focused itinerary

This is an adventurous journey, including hazardous Mediterranean voyages in flimsy ships, road journeys across bandit territory, and country treks through fever-infested lowlands. Paul and Barnabas press on to new places where hostile crowds speak unfamiliar dialects. They are certain of the Spirit’s call and

the Lord’s presence. Paul is often comforted by the Lord’s presence, Acts 18. 10; 2 Tim. 4. 17.

The locations they visit are strategic. First, the missionaries head to Cyprus, the home of Barnabas, Acts 4. 36. Then they move to the South Galatia region, where there are some Jewish communities. There are no social or national barriers in the church, Gal. 3. 28; Col. 3. 11. Therefore, Paul addresses a wide variety of people – Jews and Gentiles, rulers and commoners, men and women – when he preaches.

The narrative establishes parallels between the experiences of Peter and Paul. See the table for details.

Experience	Peter	Paul
preaching to Jews	Acts 2 (Pentecost)	Acts 13 (Pisidian Antioch)
preaching to non-Jews	Acts 10 (Cornelius)	Acts 14 (Lystra)
confrontation with magician	Acts 8 (Simon)	Acts 13 (Elymas)
help for a lame man	Acts 3 (Jerusalem)	Acts 14 (Lystra)
beaten	Acts 5 (Jerusalem)	Acts 14 (Lystra)
report to local church	Acts 11 (Jerusalem)	Acts 14 (Antioch)

In the two summarized sermons at Pisidian Antioch and Lystra, Paul presents the message as ‘glad tidings’, 13. 32, 14. 21 JND. We too must be ready to share this message of hope in our day. Paul shows cultural sensitivity, presenting a covenant-keeping God to the Jews, 13. 17, and a faithful creator God to the non-Jews, 14. 15.

Preaching the gospel always produces results. There is persecution of the missionaries, 13. 50; 14. 19, and joy as souls are saved, 13. 48. Local churches are established and taught, 14. 22-23, with shepherds appointed. Paul provides ongoing prayer support, v. 23. He

refers to this as ‘the care of all the churches’, 2 Cor. 11. 28. We often hear that lack of blessing today is because we don’t *preach* like Paul did. Maybe another reason is that we don’t *pray* like Paul did. First century missionary work was enveloped in prayer. Let’s ensure that 21st century gospel work is conducted in the same atmosphere.

¹ C. H. SPURGEON, *The Salt-Cellars*, Available online.

² W. BARCLAY, *Daily Study Bible. The Acts of the Apostles*, St. Andrew Press, 1976.

PREACHING WITH A TABLET

Part 5: Putting it All Together

BY R. SCOTT THOMSON USA

And He said to them, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature', Mark 16. 15.

We have reached the final article in our Tablet preaching series.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this series as much as I have enjoyed writing it. More importantly, my prayer is that the series has helped you cultivate new techniques for the proclamation of God's Good News!

In the first article, I tried to emphasize that preaching with a Tablet is NOT about trying to look cool!

If you are trying to look cool then you should question your motivation for using a Tablet; more importantly, you should question if you should be preaching at all!

Consider these verses:

- 'Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness', Jas. 3.1 ESV;
- 'But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be a disqualified', 1 Cor. 9. 27 ESV;
- 'And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God', 1 Cor. 2. 1-5 ESV.

Preaching should never be about 'me'– it should never be about dazzling crowds of people, gaining

a large following, or even convincing others of my point of view. Rather, preaching must always be about Him and His word. He must receive the glory.

Paul wrote to Timothy 'preach the word', 2 Tim. 4. 2. Should we preach anything different? Absolutely not!

DR. HADDON ROBINSON in his book *Biblical Preaching* wrote: 'Ministers can proclaim anything in a stained-glass voice at 11:30 on Sunday morning following the singing of hymns. Yet when they fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority. No longer do they confront their hearers with a word from God. That is why most modern preaching evokes little more than a wide yawn. God is not in it'.¹

As I close this series I would like to encourage you to prioritize your time. While we should become proficient with the tools we use, ultimately preaching is not about the latest and greatest app. We must focus our time and attention on God's holy word. We must fall to our knees asking God for His leading and blessing.

Finally, we must humble ourselves before God and repent of our sins. 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise', Ps. 51. 17.

¹ HADDON W. ROBINSON. *Biblical Preaching*, Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001, pg 20.