

Overcoming Our Fears of Testimony

I. For one who is reading it for this first time, the account of Paul and Barnabas's dispute in Acts 15 is one that is almost hard to believe: (*Acts 15:36-41*)

A. These two men have been virtually inseparable since the time of Paul's conversion:

Since Barnabas first stood up and vouched for Paul in *Acts 9:27*, to the Holy Spirit setting them aside for a special work in *Acts 13:2*

B. As these two close friends and brothers are preparing to set out on a second journey to spread the gospel, they had a disagreement so fierce over who they should take that it caused them to part ways and take separate trips:

i. John Mark, who had been with them for a time starting in Acts 12, had abandoned them in Pamphylia: As such Paul had no desire to take him along for a second time:

C. Many have wondered and speculated at what caused John Mark to desert the group back in Acts 13:13; but most agree that it boils down to hesitancy and fear:

i. We could imagine a fairly lengthy lists of the sorts of dangers they were facing on these journeys:

a) The inherent dangers of travel

b) The constant harassment of the Jews

c) The rejection and opposition of idolators

d) Or perhaps devoting that much time to teaching simply wasn't what he thought it would be

D. Whatever his exact reasons were it is clearly communicated by Paul's reaction that he did not think John Mark would make an effective evangelist for this journey:

II. It is very easy for us to come down very hard on the whipping boys of the Bible:

Those characters who it is very easy for us to treat like punching bags and really let into them for their shortcomings: The King Sauls, the Peters, the Balaams, and the John Marks of the Bible:

A. I don't think God had their stories recorded so that we could have outlets for someone to ridicule: They are certainly not there to make ourselves feel better by comparison:

i. What we can say with every bit of certainty is that they are there for our learning: And what we will often learn if we are honest with ourselves is that we are a lot more alike with these men and women than we care to admit:

a) Like Balaam and Saul we often seek our own way despite all sense

b) Like Peter we can be prone to speak too quickly and without much thought

c) And much like John Mark, *we are often hesitant and fearful evangelists*

B. We are all evangelists to some degree, having all been called by Jesus in *Matthew 28* to spread the good news about his Death, Burial, and Resurrection

i. And much like John Mark we often set out with every intention of really getting the Word out there: We make goals, resolutions, and set out with determination that this week, or this month I'm finally going to invite _____. I'm going to ask _____ to start reading the Bible with me: I'm going to start a study in my home for friends and neighbors...

2. And much like John Mark we desert those ideas in Pamphylia:

C. Why is that? Why is it that as a group of people who are claimed to be very excited about God, very excited about Jesus, Christians are very often only excited to talk about those things with other Christians?

i. With John Mark, there were real and probably substantial reasons for his hesitancy and fear: If there was nothing keeping people from sharing the gospel, then everyone would be doing it all the time!

2. And the truth is, that for each one of us there are different reasons why we are not always effective and active like we need to be:

a) In the remainder of this study, let us take the time to look at some of the common reasons that Christians are not sharing God's Word:

III. Sharing the Gospel is Hard Work! (*Ephesians 6:10-20*)

A. Evangelism, especially in the United States, is not always as simple as telling someone what they've never heard before:

- i. I have never met anyone, (nor met anyone who has), that has never heard of Jesus
 - a) I've never encountered anyone who hasn't heard, even if they don't believe it, that he died, was buried, and rose again.
 - b) I've never met anyone who hasn't heard of sin, who hasn't at least heard of baptism
 - c) Until recently, I'd never met anyone who hadn't had an opportunity to read a Bible for themselves, and even then it wasn't as though they hadn't heard of it:
 - d) The number of people that we are likely to come in contact to that have never heard the basic concepts of religion are so few that they likely cannot be represented in graph form

B. What Evangelism does involve, is an awful lot of convincing:

1. It involves convincing people who are well aware of someone called Jesus, they are well aware of some book called the Bible, and they are vaguely aware that the way they are living is at odds with many of the teachings it holds... and they are perfectly content:
 - a) It involves convincing worldly people, that the physical lifestyle they are enjoying so much is worthless:
 - b) It involves convincing skeptics to exchange the seen for the unseen: to walk by faith and not by sight!
2. For those who have made the choice to try and shed those things, it involves long hours of hard work, trying to peel back layer after layer of doctrinal deception and different creeds that have been taught over sometimes years and years.
 - a) It involves prayer and hope that they won't become disillusioned or just get tired and give up before they gain an understanding of what the Bible teaches as truth:

C. It feels like a fight because it is! It is a fight for that person's soul! It is why we are commanded to put on a set of armor: Not so that we can have exciting Bible class props: But because we are in a battle!

1. Evangelism involves invading the enemy army's camp, rescuing a hostage, and fighting your way back out with man in tow:

D. For many: The realization that Evangelism takes work is the first hurdle that must be overcome:

IV. Fears of Inadequacy:

A. Fear can keep many a man from speaking. The rulers of the Jews thought it such an effective hurdle that they twice tried to throw it at the apostles!

1. In Acts 4:17-22, Peter and John are threatened twice that they immediately stop spreading the word about a resurrected Jesus
2. In Acts 5, after laying hands on the apostles and throwing them in jail, the angel of the Lord released these men and they went back at once to preaching
3. This of course angered the high priest and his associates and led to more threatening in v 27-28

a) While the Apostles overcame their fear without hesitation, more many we are held captive by fears of inadequacy:

B. Many suffer from a perpetual "Moses Syndrome"

1. We've been given a charge to carry out:
2. We've been given an incorruptible and all powerful Word, that contains "all things pertaining to life and Godliness", and with it the "man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work:"
3. We've been given the power to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and... take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
4. And yet we have the nerve to look to God and say "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Ex. 4:10) Send your message by another!

C. And yet an unfounded low self-esteem is not the only fear of inadequacy that has taken hold of many Christians: Many have a fear of failure because they don't actually understand success:

1. One of the most encouraging verses for Evangelism is found in the first Corinthian letter:
2. In the context of explaining that no man is more important in the Kingdom than another, explains the definition of success:
 - a) I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. (1 Cor. 3:6-7)
3. The success of the evangelist is not measured in how many people respond to the seed that is planted: If we judge our success by growth that “we cause”, we are setting ourselves for failure because we don’t cause the growth of any!
 - a) The success of every Christian as an evangelist is measured by whether or not they are active in the field:
 - b) Everyone here can be a successful evangelist