

Overcoming Our Fear Of Testimony:

Part Two: (Acts 4:23-31)

I. Jeremiah 20:7-13 is one of my favorite sections of the book. The imagery is so clear and vibrant in relating the struggles that come with keeping God's charge to spread His word:

A. Here we have Jeremiah, one of the mighty prophets of the Old Testament, and he is coming before the Lord expressing his frustration.

B. It is a passage that makes the prophet very relatable to his readers as he is quite simply saying, "God, sometimes I just don't feel like preaching your Word"

1. Now: Certainly Jeremiah is not a worldly minded man. He has not been struck with a streak of spiritual disinterest or rebellion:

2. But what Jeremiah is admitting is the very thing that we began to study in our first lesson: Telling others the message God has given us to share is often a hard and tiring work!

a) He states that the message he has to give is something that nobody wants to listen to! (v 8)

b) He says that those who hear him mock everything that he has to say, while still others are just looking, and watching for the moment where he will make a mistake and fall! (v7, 12)

c) Ultimately though, He expressing confidence in God to prevail and deliver him from his situation

3. But the real standout verse is that of verse 9: During those times when Jeremiah held in what he knew he should be telling to others, He says that God's Word was like a fire burning within his bones, and all of his strength was sapped from holding it in.

C. To continue our thoughts from our first lesson, Why do more people *not* feel this way?

1. Christians are certainly guilty of holding in God's Word; but for many the feeling would more accurately be described as a mild indigestion if it registered at all:

Hardly would it be portrayed as an unquenchable fire burning from the inside out!

II. As we began to answer this question we discussed a few different fears and hesitations that often hold God's people back from sharing His Word:

- A. The initial realization that evangelism is hard work that seldom takes place on easy roads is enough of a discouragement that many are kept from every making any real effort in the first place
- B. Often those who do hesitantly put their foot out the door are very quickly turned away by unfounded fears of inadequacy: We spoke about how in spite of being given every thing necessary to complete the task, Christians have been sold a lie that they are just not talented enough:
- C. Then there is the need for Christians to understand that success is measured not in how many people you sway, but in the sowing of the seed itself.
 - i. As we continue this study, let us look at a few more fears that Christians need to overcome as we work to carry out the great charge that God has given to each of us.

III. The Fear of Rejection

- A. This is not to say that we will not be rejected, but rather that it is not something that God will accept as an excuse for not telling others: ***Luke 9:3-5***
 - i. In addition to the record in Luke, Matthew also records some pretty choice words from the Lord about what to expect in preparing the way for His coming:
 - a) Ministry is like going out as a sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16)
 - b) The message that you have will not be very popular to many, causing families to turn against each other, and many people to despise you (10:21-22)
 - c) In both of these contexts the disciples are actually warned about the physical danger of their mission, talking about being handed over before rulers and persecuted:
 - (i) But the important thing is this: Despite the high level of difficulty and the certainty of rejection by many, in both accounts Jesus says that we you are rejected, pick yourself up, and move on to the next person: *Matt. 10:14,23 Do Christians have this attitude today?*

2. Christians need to become more adept at shaking the dust off: We live, and God willing we will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, in an environment where we face very little if any danger for spreading the Gospel:

- a) The worst thing that will happen to most Christians in evangelism is a slammed door
- b) If this is a friend or acquaintance the relationship might strain or break, but even then, this is a relatively minor consequence:
- c) If Jesus was telling His followers to be willing to pick themselves up and move on, when the reason they were down is because of the rocks thrown at them by their enemies, shouldn't we feel more than a little ashamed for letting the fear of rejection keep us from evangelizing?

B. Sadly, it is not the rejection from the world that many Christians are afraid of. Some Christians are afraid of the opposition that they might face from other members of the Church who are not very active themselves: It is unfortunate, but in many places that fear is not unfounded:

1. Perhaps one cannot imagine somebody discouraging someone from evangelism.

Consider this: How will I react when somebody tries to get me to be more active:

- a) Do I respond with a guilty conscience, because I've not be active myself, Do I belittle their efforts? Do I try to tell them they don't know what they are doing? Do I speak ill of them to others and imagine all sorts of motives, thinking that they have such a high opinion of themselves?
- b) Maybe it has been so long since I engaged in sharing myself, that I respond with a certain degree of cynicism: "well, they will cool down soon enough" This is only temporary. Or they will get a dose of reality soon enough
- c) I have seen all of these attitudes and more, try to snuff out the spirit of evangelism in various congregations:

2. It is not spoken of in this context, but I cannot help but think of the description of Jesus in Matt 12:20: A mender of bruised reeds and smoldering wicks.

- a) When someone has become excited about sharing God's Word, whatever the cause might be, we need to put every ounce of effort we can into supporting them. To fan the flame of that wick and be encouraged to do more ourselves!

IV. What Kind of Examples Are We?

A. This is really just a continuation of the same point: Many Christians cannot imagine themselves in the role of an active and excited evangelist among their friends and neighbors because they have never really been exposed to an example of one:

1. Are we doing our best to act as mentors and role models as believers who are seeking to share a message?
2. If those who are around me have the idea that evangelizing is occasionally inviting someone to attend a worship service, then I need to step back and see what kind of example I'm giving.

B. Now, you may say, there is no way of knowing some of the things that we are doing in our own time:

1. That is true: but it shouldn't be: Evangelism is not the giving of alms to the poor: It is not something that is to be done in secret: In fact: How was it that Jesus sent out his followers? Two by Two (Mark 6:7)
2. Suggest this: If you are active in teaching your friends and neighbors: take someone with you:

V. Fear of Not Knowing What to Say:

A. There are a few of passages that have given cause for undue amounts of stress:

1. *But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; I Peter 3:14-15*
2. *I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. II Tim 4:1-2*
3. *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. II Tim 2:15*

B. Now, what does this passage not mean?

1. You need to know greek, hebrew, and aramaic in order to be an adequate evangelist
2. You must have the whole of scripture memorized in order to tell the gospel story

3. You must be able to give an immediate and complete answer for any question you might encounter:

a) First of all, this is not a representation of what will actually happen in studying with people: The world is not filled with intellectual giants who spend their time forming impossible biblical questions on the off chance that you ever knock on their door:

C. These passages do tell us however that we are to be well acquainted with God's Word; We should feel comfortable handling it, and discussing it with others:

1. Some suggestions might include:

a) At the very least, being able to give a short 2-3 sentence summary on what the purpose of *every* book in the Bible is: ie:

(1) *Genesis: The early account of creation and God choosing His special people*

(2) *Joshua: The details of the conquest and division of the promised land*

(3) *Obadiah: God's message of repentance to the nation of Edom...*

b) Being able to tell the general "story" of the Bible: A brief overview of the time periods and how they lead up to Jesus

c) A hands on familiarity with a handful of Bible books that you've read over and over again

d) The "first things" of the Gospel

2. These are but a few suggestions: The point is that the fear of knowing not what to say is not something that should be brought on by a misconception that one must have the whole of scripture committed to memory.

a) However, this very well may be something that is legitimately holding some people back: If one does not have a general ability to handle scripture, then it is something that one needs to work on with the view of bettering their evangelistic efforts.