

ACTS 13:44-49 | Speak the Message Boldly

Sunday, January 18, 2015 – The 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord

⁴⁴ The following Sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear the message of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to oppose what Paul was saying by insulting him.

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas boldly said: "It was necessary that God's message be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles! ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

I have made you
a light for the Gentiles
to bring salvation
to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ So the message of the Lord spread through the whole region.

For some people, it's hard not to react to good news. The heart starts pumping, your body begins to tense up, and you can't help but smile. Emotions begin to bubble to the surface and maybe you even begin to tear up or cry out in joy.

For others, it's hard not to react to bad news. The heart starts pounding, fists begin to close, teeth clench, and a fit of rage begins to build up. Emotions begin to spill over as you struggle to keep from screaming and yelling in complete anger or rage.

Regardless of the news, we see that any type of news elicits some sort of reaction. And when you ask people what type of news they like to give, I sure the usual answer is good news. Who could blame them? Personally, I enjoy seeing people smile when something good has happened. I take pleasure in hearing laughter fly off the lips. I relish the opportunity to see a person fall apart in relief when good news is given. I like good news.

And the reciprocal is true, too. I don't like giving bad news. I don't like the uncomfortable feeling I get when I don't or can't feel the emotion of the person to whom I'm speaking. And like many, I don't like being yelled at or cursed at or being the object of someone's rage. In general, I don't like giving bad news.

We see a similar situation today in our reading. Paul and Barnabas had just begun their first mission journey. They had left Syrian Antioch and had already stood before the king of a nation on the island of Cyprus. They made their way onto the mainland of Asia Minor, and traveled to the largest city in central Asia Minor—Pisidian Antioch. Antioch was a Roman colony and a Jewish center. In the 1st century world, it was a prime example of a culturally diverse city. Romans and rabbis walked the streets. Synagogues and temples to gods were dotted throughout the city. And a mixture of middle eastern, Roman, and Greek culture mixed. It was the perfect place for Paul to preach.

But the message he had was a hard one to preach. It was hard because on the one hand he had good news for all of the gentiles—the non-Jewish people of the city. He had a message of peace and forgiveness, of sins forgiven, of life in heaven. This would be a drastic change to the doom and gloom of the Greek and Roman mythology they had been following before. No longer would appeasement need to be made to their gods. They would no longer need to work for life. Life had been given freely to them through Christ!

But on the other hand he also had a message of bad news for the Jews. God had moved on from them. He hadn't forgotten the Jewish people, but because of their rejection they were no longer his sole, chosen people. Their rejection and blatant disregard for God and his Word had consequences, and that was a message that was hard for Paul to preach to his own people.

But he did it. And he did it boldly. "Then Paul and Barnabas boldly said: "It was necessary that God's message be spoken to you first. But since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles! For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" What a difficult thing to say. But he said what needed to be said. "You consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life." That should have hit home for the Jews. If they were honest with themselves they would see that what they were doing was placing themselves above God. To them, God's salvation wasn't good enough. For them, Christ's work didn't do enough. So they added more. They were simply too good, or too bad, to be saved. More had to be done. And Paul realized that something had to be said.

Sometimes we find others getting caught in the same trap as the Jews, don't we? Maybe even sometimes we're caught in that trap. We find ourselves playing the "can I do enough?" game in our daily lives. We take a census of everything we've done in a day and consider the "goodness" of said things. We justify ourselves in God's sight by thinking that we aren't like someone else or don't "sin as badly" as others. We, like the Pharisee in the temple, stand before God and say, "Thank you Lord that you haven't made me like..." And shame on us...that attitude is dangerous. That attitude is deadly. That attitude sends us to hell.

But even more shame on us when someone speaks boldly to us. When someone recognizes the path we are on and makes a Godly decision to speak the Law to our hearts. And our reaction to our Christian brother or sister? Anger. Hatred. Jealousy. Contempt. We throw up our defenses and begin the ad hominem attacks, making points that are directed at this other person's character. "Yeah, well what about that time you..." "You have no right to talk, look at how you..." Shame on us. That person isn't just a friend, that person isn't just a fellow Christian. When God's Word comes out of that person's mouth, he or she is speaking as if God himself were standing in front of you. Would we treat God with such vileness and contempt? Would we spurn his chastising?

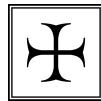
It takes boldness to speak such words because such words are hard to speak. We know what type of reaction they might elicit. We know how hurt or embarrassed that person might feel. So it takes boldness to speak these words to someone.

But such boldness has results. We can be bold because we know what words we're speaking. We know the power of such words: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) But just as this Word searches the heart, it also saves it. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the

beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind." (John 1:1-4) You see, the difficult task of boldly speaking God's law may lead to an amazing opportunity to speak God's saving gospel. When John cried out, "Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," (John 1:29) he wasn't just speaking in theoretical terms. Christ's sacrifice has paid for sin—all sin. And that message wasn't just for Jews, it wasn't just for Gentiles, it was for all people. Paul would later write a letter to these very people in Pisidian Antioch. We call that letter the Letter to the Galatians. In it he wrote, " There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

And so that message doesn't take boldness. It doesn't take courage. It doesn't require strength of heart. That message requires love. Love for a person struggling with sin. Love for a person caught in temptation. Love for a person being pressed down by despair. The message of God's love through Christ is a message meant for many.

So, dear Christians, be bold. Address sin in your lives. Be strong and speak to that person who is neglecting God and his Word. Be bold and speak to that person who is knowingly and purposefully sinning. Be bold and speak God's Law in all its harshness to them. That conversation could lead to a much easier, much more enjoyable conversation. That person could recognize sin for sin, he or she could see the love you have for them, he or she will know forgiveness in the most effective way. But most importantly, he or she will be right with God through repentance and faith. All because you were bold enough to speak up... Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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