

# SEEING THE LIGHT

*how to prepare your heart for learning and sharing the gospel*

## LESSON 11 | AMAZING CONDITIONS AND COMPELLING RESOLVE | 2/14/2021

We have considered how Saul of Tarsus came to the gospel and how that good news captured his heart. He started on that road to an unending road to follow his King as a sharer of that blessed light. How Paul shared that message (or, evangelized) is evident in Acts. Just as he told Agrippa that he had not proven disobedient to the vision (26:19), we too must not be disobedient to call to help others see the light, as he did, the same way we did.

One example of evangelism is Paul's work leading up to and ending in Athens. Look at some of the people Paul met in Philippi before he arrived in Athens:

1. **A Deeply Religious Woman.** Perhaps like a modern woman, Lydia, a businesswoman, running her own business, and travelling for her export business (from Thyatira in Asia Minor) was also a religious woman. Since purple dye is connected to Thyatira and also was in great demand in the Empire, she was likely quite wealthy and independent. On the Sabbath, she had sought out others (i.e. women) to pray at the riverside just as Paul was doing indicating her deeply religious faith as a "worshiper of God."
2. **A Deeply Oppressed Girl.** Very different from Lydia, the unnamed slave girl is healed by Paul from demon possession – and it would be a fair assumption to believe became a follower of Jesus afterward. The girl's masters made a lot of money from her fortune-telling that was aided by the possession. Her life in the occult/dark arts and her livelihood managed by men would have been oppressive. But Paul turned and healed her to silence the demon – and likewise, set her free from her slavery – completely. And despite her appearance and clear connections to the darker arts, Paul was unafraid to help her.
3. **A Suicidal Man.** The prison officer was not someone Paul went out to meet (as he did Lydia) or decide on his own to help (the girl). Instead, the circumstance of Paul's work that landed him in prison brought them together. In the Roman world, an escaped prisoner meant punishment by death to their jailors. When this jailor made the attempt on his life, Paul stopped him and shared the gospel with him – good news that would have restored the man's self-worth and self-awareness that God would forgive him. While death is a good opening conversation starter, life will always be the answer.

**Here were three very different people** who experienced the saving power of Jesus Christ. The first European converts (through Paul) show the diversity of people that are drawn to the gospel. And these three began the gospel in Philippi (the church that Paul would speak so highly of) despite their diversity. Paul would say of them, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.. because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now [because] you know no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again" (Phil 1:4; 4:15-16). This church began **with people like that** "from the first day." And they were committed to evangelism in their community and in the outreaches in the world where men they could support would be supported to the glory of God.

This awareness is vitally important. They had that opportunity as people from varied backgrounds because they were not overlooked or disregarded by Paul himself. Whether deeply spiritual or deeply troubled, they were "ripe unto harvest" as we may say. Paul's eyes were open to see the possibility in people – real people – in need of the same message that saved him – who in turn who see the need for sharing that gospel abroad. He did not just connect with religious Lydia; he connected with a deeply oppressed girl and a suicidal man. *Paul was not amazing*; he was just compelled with the same resolve that helped himself see the light. "The Switch" for evangelism for him, like it should be for us will be a state of mind – not a mood – we choose to be in.

So, when the Athenians asked Paul for more info on what he had been reasoning and conversing already with him in the days before, he spoke to them. *They were seekers but they were seekers who had been sought.* In Athens, "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (17:16). Athens was a pagan city by all accounts. So when Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles that he had been for some time, saw their idolatry, "his spirit was provoked" he "reasoned with them in the marketplaces" (17: 17). But he did not speak to only those pagan Gentiles, he also "reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons." Evangelism will always be for anyone with whom we may have contact.

In regard to evangelistic methods, D.L. Moody once said, "The method I do is better than the method you don't do." And frankly, that's true. However, we need to return regularly to what Paul did to see how we should. And while it remains true that his ministry was a pattern of sound words, the simple way to find the "best" approach for personal evangelist is: *go out and talk to people*. We should talk to anyone (Mk. 16:15, cf. Mt. 28:19–20). We should not see them as rich or poor, smart or foolish, good or "evil." We all should see them as ourselves and as Paul saw himself. Further, we should feel indebted just as Paul felt indebted to Christ (Rom. 1:15). He did not talk

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to everyone he met – but he talked often to many people. That’s what we should strive for out of a genuine love for Christ and for others.

There are further applications about how Paul evangelized in Athens. In spite of the differing conditions, Paul manifested great resolve. The message needed to be shared. People needed to hear. “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news” (Romans 10:15b).

1. He preached to where people were: “**I see that you are very religious.**”
2. His preaching did not spring from hate: his “**provoked spirit**” led to reason and gentle words, “**I see.**”
3. His method was not to disdain or to put them down either: you are “**very religious.**”
4. He reasoned from what they would know: “your altars.. and **even one of your poets.**”
5. He took them to the call to repentance: “He calls all men **to repent.**”
6. He delivered evidence: “**by raising Him from the dead.**”
7. And he returned in spite of mixed reactions: “some mocked... some believed.”

Further, there are some modern applications to collective evangelistic work that churches do together for evangelism that from Paul we can also “see the light.” While some people came to them, most of the evangelism was personal and presented to people to whom Christians spoke. While some unbelievers did come into assemblies that could lead to faith (1Cor 14:23), Paul’s own work shows that most evangelism was truly personal. Also, Paul did not build a church around the community. He did not go around Athens asking people what they wanted in a church and then proceed to put together great programs with contemporary music and uplifting messages. “Build it and they will come” evangelism is not what Paul did – nor did he “Build it to get them to come” either.

Here are some other observations:

1. **Paul focused on where people were.** He went to large population centers because he would impact more who would impact others (c.f. 2Tim 2:2). Paul was in Ephesus for three years teaching and preaching daily. The result was everyone in Asia had opportunity to hear the gospel – both Jews and Greek (Acts 19:10). Also, Thessalonica radiated the gospel abroad and “sounded out the word” through Macedonia, Achaia, and “in every place” (1Thes 1:8).
2. **Paul searched for devout people.** Whether synagogues or palisades of idols, we find Paul teaching and preaching to people there. In Athens, it may have been in the market or from Areopagus’ while in Ephesus, it was “from house to house.” Wherever the opportunity presented itself, Paul taught.
3. **Paul established only churches.** This fact of apostolic history is so self-evident that *it should shock* modern methods of evangelism today. He started no missions, hospitals, schools, or orphanages. The vast work He accomplished was aimed at *saving people* in the kingdom of Christ – not building infrastructures. He saw the church as God’s manifold wisdom in His eternal purpose in Christ *for people* (Eph 3:9-11). And to reach the fulness of that purpose, He said that God “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11, 12) which is what Paul did – in every church (Acts 14:23).
4. **Paul’s method encouraged an indigenous movement.** Each church had its own local men as overseers, its own local treasury, and its own local responsibility. Nor was there to be any shirking or transferring of responsibility. Each congregation was a candlestick and sons of God were to “shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life . . .” (Phil 2:15, 16). Even in financial matters, it was never intended that one congregation should sit back and receive at ease while another was over-burdened. Paul himself said, “for I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality” (2Cor 8:13, 14).

In Acts 16, we have seen how Paul evangelized by seeing who he evangelized - everyone. And they three very different people — Lydia the businesswoman, the demon-possessed slave girl and the Philippian Jailer. In Acts 17, he also preached to people very different from him and his religion. Yet, he still built a bridge with how “very religious” they were – and then led the message to repentance. His amazing resolve to share the gospel message was unrelenting in every situation.

May we all – with the same open eyes that Paul finally came to have – trust our selves to the same powerful light and save people from the darkness that blinds them – as it once blinded us.