

Announcing the Good News of the Kingdom (#2)

In our previous discussion of **A**nnouncing the good news to those who are outside of Christ we emphasized the importance of clarifying and speaking the right message. In this lesson we will consider the *evidences* the spokesmen appealed to, the *form* in which they communicated the message, and the *manner* in which they spoke.

Evidence for the Truthfulness of the Message

Whether a person accepts the message we proclaim depends on a number of factors including our speaking to them, the condition of their heart, and God's work in them. In the New Testament we also read about miracles that bolstered the message, and noted a parallel between this and our **R**eflecting the Kingdom by our words, relationships, and deeds (cf. pp. 51 ff.). Another good example of the persuasive power of a godly life is the insightful and challenging description of Barnabas:

"He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (Acts 11:24).






I've never heard anyone pushing the "good person full of the Holy Spirit and faith" method of outreach, but this verse shows that the way we live our lives provides evidence for the truth of the gospel.

In addition to **R**eflecting the Kingdom with our lives and deeds, we can also provide evidence for the truthfulness of the gospel with our words. I don't think an old school, walking encyclopedia type apologists would fare very well in a postmodern, skeptical society. Still, it is appropriate for us to provide some verbal evidence for the truth of the Christian message.

The Barna Research Group was designed to provide Christians with credible knowledge and clear thinking, enabling them to navigate a complex and changing culture. In a 2019 study of Evangelism, they found that better evidence for the truthfulness of Christianity was the top reason non-Christians gave for what would make them more interested in pursuing Christ. They said this would influence them even more than if Christianity itself had a better reputation, if the Christians they knew were more humble or if they had a personal, eye-opening spiritual experience.

This is supported by Scripture. The early spokesmen often gave some kind of evidence in their messages to non-Christians. The infographic below shows some of the ways they did this. Study it a few minutes and then answer the questions that follow.

Evidence for the Gospel in the Messages in Acts

Type	Audience	Possible Modern Parallels
 Eyewitness	Jews (2:32; 3:15; 5:32) God fearing Gentiles (10:39, 41) Both (13:31) (Cf. Luke 1:1-2; Acts 1:8, 22; 22:15-16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are not actual eyewitnesses of Jesus (<i>see Acts 1:21-22</i>), but we can tell people there were eyewitnesses We can also testify (in a slightly different sense) to what we have experienced of Christ in our lives.
 Scripture	Jews (2:24-28, 34-35; 3:18, 22-26; 4:11 <i>cf.</i> 8:32-35) God-fearing Gentiles (10:43; 13:32-35, 40-41) Both (13:29, 33; 17:2; <i>cf.</i> v. 11) (Not to full fledged Gentiles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can and should use Scripture when speaking to anyone who respects it. We can turn to it, quote it, or paraphrase it I wouldn't say not to use it with people who don't respect it, but we may do better with other evidences.
 Creator	Full Fledged Gentiles (14:15-17; 17:24-27, 29) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rain, crops, food and joy testify to God's kindness Since we are created in God's image, we shouldn't think God is like an idol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scripture elsewhere says that the creation testifies to the Creator (<i>Psalms 19:1-6; Romans 1:18-20</i>) We can tell / ask people to consider what the created universe suggests about the existence and nature of God
 Life Experience	Full Fledged Gentiles (17:23) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paul seems to be saying that the fact that they have an idol to an unknown God indicates that they feel they are missing something. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some people today may relate to the idea that something is missing in their lives. Research indicates younger people may feel this more than older people
 Poetry/Art	Full Fledged Gentiles (17:28) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instead of quoting Scripture, Paul quotes Greek Poetry that contains spiritual truth and shows us that it is good to do so. This would have been better known to this audience than the Scriptures, and probably also had more credibility to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Music is an enormous part of our society, and we do well to find lyrics that present truth in language non-Christians understand and relate to. Broadening what Paul did, we can also look for truth in other art forms such as movies and television

1. Can you think of any additional evidences in the Bible or elsewhere that might be useful for supporting the message we speak?
2. Do you think we should always use the same kind of evidence or do you think different kinds of evidence fit different hearers?
3. Which two evidences above do you think would have best support the message you have been working on to share with the non-Christians you may get an opportunity to talk to? List three examples of how you could do each (for example, if you choose Scripture, list three Scriptures that you think would help bolster the message you want to speak to them).

The Form of the Communication

When we communicate the message about Christ and provide evidence for it, we also need to pay attention to the form of our speech. For example, verbal communication can be conversation, technical lecture, motivational speech, gossip, jokes, sales pitch, story, anecdote, political rhetoric, etc.

Generally the primary form of communication a person uses should fit their message, purpose and audience. You don't want to use the form of a Graduate School University Lecture when addressing high school students on the subject of the joy of falling in love. Nor do you want to use an anecdote to convince scientists to invest in your new arthritis remedy. If you used jokes to tell about a car accident, not only would it be inappropriate, it would confuse people about what really happened.

I don't believe we have paid enough attention to the *form* by which the gospel is to be communicated to those outside Christ. As noted above (p. 61), *the primary form in the New Testament is proclamation, announcement or telling good news*. These words are used much more commonly than any others to describe how Jesus and the early spokespersons told the message. Evangelism is not a sales pitch, an offer, a motivational speech, nor an information dump. Rather, we are **A**nnouncing remarkable, significant news about something extra-ordinary that God has done. You can announce, proclaim, or tell good news to thousands of people at a time (Acts 2) or to a single individual (Acts 8:26-40). The number of listeners isn't the essence of the form. Rather, the essence of the appropriate form is announcing or telling good news about something remarkable that God has done.

If we use the wrong form of communication to proclaim the news about Christ, we run the risk of distorting the message and its significance. For example, if we change **A**nnouncing the good news into a sales pitch or an offer, people may assume negotiation is appropriate, which might lead them to think they can bargain with God. Thinking of evangelism in terms of sales might also lead us to subconsciously distort the message by "lowering the cost" or "highlighting the benefits." Reducing the message to the form of a "sound bite" would also fall short, because we could not adequately communicate the significance of who Jesus is, what God has done in him, nor the response that is necessary in that way. All these forms are inappropriate to the gospel and distort the message.

For years I limited my communication of the gospel to outsiders to a single form—"teaching a Bible study." I set up and taught Bible studies with non-Christians numerous times over the decades. Sometimes I would study all the way through the Gospel of Mark with people before getting to the heart of the gospel. This approach certainly helped a lot of people see who Jesus is. I believe God used these studies, and a number of people came to Christ this way. Still, I now think there are also some limitations to using the form of "Bible study" to tell the good news to non-Christians.

One is that I often lost my sense of urgency about the gospel because the studies were drawn out for months. If I were going to tell my wife the good news of the Smith's new baby and I drew it out for a couple months, I'd live to regret it! The spokesperson in the New Testament did not do this.

In addition, I sometimes missed opportunities because I was so intent on the form of setting up a Bible study. When I lived in Philadelphia there was a radio announcer who lived right across the street from the church building. We met on the street one day and later had a number of conversations about the Bible and Christianity. He clearly had spiritual

interest, so I tried repeatedly to set up a Bible study with him. Sadly, he never agreed. I now realize I could have proclaimed the gospel to him multiple times standing out in the church yard if I hadn't been so focused on setting up a Bible study. That's exactly what I would do today. With the best of intentions, my singular focus on communicating the gospel through a particular form was putting up an unnecessary barrier to the gospel.

At some point it dawned on me that, as far as we can tell, the early spokespersons of the good news always gave at least a summary of the entire message the first time they spoke it, unless they were interrupted (as in Acts 7, 14, 26). Sometimes they spoke the word in the same setting multiple times. Presumably this would include many of the same people plus new ones on the subsequent occasions (for example Acts 13:44; 17:1-4, 32; 19:8, 9). They seem to have set out the entire message all at once, perhaps multiple times, but then also to go back and delve into more detail about various parts of it, as needed.

We can do the same. In contrast to what I did in all those Bible studies over the years, I now announce the entire message in about five minutes, just as I described above (p. 65) and illustrated in the video (07 Announcing the Kingdom – 1). Then, through dialog, I can identify aspects of the message that need further explanation or barriers that need to be addressed. But getting the entire message out at the beginning helps preserve the gospel's ideal form as announcement or news. It also shows trust that God will work through his power for salvation (Romans 1:16).

Proclaiming, however, doesn't mean you "preach at them," in the unfortunate negative sense that the word preaching sometimes has today. Rather, preaching is telling good news! We are announcing wonderful news about some truly remarkable events and their meaning.

Nor does proclaiming mean you start talking and then talk non-stop until you say everything you want to say. Pauses are appropriate. For example, Peter, after getting to the point that Jesus is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), seems to have paused long enough for a question to be asked (v. 37) before telling the people how they should respond (vv. 38ff.). This is something like a combination of proclamation and dialog.

I don't want to be legalistic about using the right form. We noticed above that other words used to describe how the message was communicated indicate different forms (p. 61). But I do believe the form we use matters, and I do think the primary forms are announcement/proclamation and telling news. I base this on their being the most common words used to describe evangelism in the New Testament and on their being

what we are going to say. We need to pray for boldness (Acts 4:23-31).

- *Not simply with words but with power, the Holy Spirit and much full assurance* (1 Thessalonians 1:5). This line is not describing how the message was received but how it was spoken (“our gospel *came* to you”). If we have heard the message ourselves and taken it to heart, the Spirit will give us much assurance about it and we will speak it with a manner appropriate to this.
- *Gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3:15). We are totally confident about the truth of the message we speak, but we do not cram it down people’s throats or patronize them. Our manner of speaking must match the truth of the message we speak. That is, we must treat people like Jesus did as we announce to them the message about Jesus. Remember, when our tone contradicts our content, people will usually hear what our tone is saying more than what our words say.

The above-mentioned Barna Research Group has some interesting data that relates to this. This is the second time I’m referring to research, so let me clarify that I do not believe research is king. I believe Jesus is King! And I put no stock in research if it contradicts my King. Sometimes, though, research may help us or support what we learn from Scripture. I want to share an example of the latter.

Another finding in the Barna research study on Evangelism was that the way non-Christian adults would most prefer to explore faith is through one-on-one, casual conversation. They preferred this over (in descending order) a casual group conversation, talking to a person at church, watching a Christian movie or video, going to a Christian concert, getting a tract, or being approached by someone on the street. What’s more, a higher percentage of people who had experienced casual, one-on-one conversation reported that they felt encouraged to continue to pursue Christianity than people who had experienced any of the other approaches. Such conversations seem to spur spiritual interest. People’s preference for casual, one-on-one conversations about Christ underscores the importance of, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer each one” (Colossians 4:4, NIV).

There’s more. The top two qualities outsiders said they would like to have in a conversation partner to discuss Christianity are that they listen without judgment and that they don’t force a conclusion. To me, that sounds an awful lot like the “respect” (listens without judgment) and “gentleness” (don’t force a conclusion) that Peter says we are to use when we give an

account of the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). It seems that this is an example of research supporting what Scripture already told us. I share it to bolster our confidence in the value of having gentle, respectful conversations about the gospel with others. Conversation may be the best setting for telling the good news in the USA today.

I might also add that the people in the survey said only about half of the Christians they knew personally actually had the two qualities they most desired—listening without judgment and not forcing a conclusion. It is imperative that we who are subjects of the King continually allow Him to transform us into servants who have these Christ-like qualities and so will be useful to Him for announcing his message in a healthy manner.

6. Are you more likely to be too forceful or too non-committal about the message? What would it look like for you to have “much full assurance” but also “gentleness and respect” (the last two bullets above)?

Practical Application (#1). Make sure you are still praying about all the things we’ve noted (see the sheet in front of your notebook).

Practical Application (#2). Keep trying to envision going out on mission any time you leave your house. Remind yourself you are God’s worker and are always on call. Watch for and make the most of any opportunity to SHARE the kingdom.

Practical Application (#3). Look back at the summary of the good news you wrote on p. 72. Also review your answers to #s 3, 5 & 6 above (pp. 75, 78). If you need to, re-write your summary of the gospel first so that it contains some evidence and is in the form of proclamation or announcement or news. Now speak that message out loud to yourself *as if you were actually announcing this wonderful news to a friend who hasn’t heard it*. Be sure to include kind of verbal evidence. Pay special attention to using the form of announcement or telling news (remember, people may know about Jesus but still not realize the news that he is God’s appointed King!).

CHALLENGE APPLICATION: find a Christian friend, tell them what you’re doing and then actually proclaim your summary of the gospel to them as you would do it with a non-Christian.