

## Announcing the Kingdom (4)

We have clarified the message we are to announce to others (pp. 61-72), discussed evidences for it (pp. 73-75), considered the form (pp. 75-78) and manner (pp. 78-80) in which we are to communicate it, and explored how we might find opportunities to do all this (pp. 81-89). In this final lesson on **A**nnouncing the kingdom, we will consider what to do after we have announced the news and what results we should expect.

### Approach to Announcing the Message

As we noted, if God does give us the opportunity, we are to announce the good news of the kingdom and King. In order to do this clearly, we need to understand the message clearly ourselves. That's why we have been working to clarify it. Take a moment right now and see if you can state a summary of the message out loud. *If not, it would be better for you to go back and work carefully through pages 63-72 again than to work on what follows here.* The gospel is God's power for saving people, and being able to state it clearly to someone is more important than what we would do next.

I believe the essential message is that God attested to Jesus' unique identity by enabling him to do miracles, but the people rejected him and turned him over to be crucified. But then God raised Jesus from the dead, showing him to be Lord of all! God commands us all to give our total loyalty to Christ the king so that we can be a part of his kingdom and enjoy its wonderful blessings. It seems to me that the spokespersons in Acts always sought to lay out a basic summary of the message like this whenever they got an opportunity to speak.

Then what? If God gives us an opportunity and we tell the essential good news of the gospel, what do we do next? I'd like to offer some ideas about three areas (A-C below) related to that question. Some of these probably won't seem important now, but they will be very relevant later when you are in the situation. You may want to note or highlight them in a way that you can find and come back to them when you need them.

#### A. How do I conclude my announcement of the message?

Here I'm not referring to how you end your whole conversation with your friend. Rather, I'm referring to how to end your initial announcement of the message to them. There is no single right way to do this. In Acts, they ended their initial proclamation of the message in a variety of ways, and some of these may give us some guidance about how we can best end our announcing the news:

- With a statement of who Jesus is (Acts 2:36)
  - With a statement that God wants to bless you by turning you from wickedness (Acts 3:26)
  - With a statement that Jesus is the only way to be saved (Acts 4:12)
  - With a statement that we are witnesses of all this and so is the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32)
  - With a statement that everyone who believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43)
  - With a warning not to do what the prophets mentioned, namely, scoff at God's work and perish (Acts 13:40)
  - With a call to repent because God is going to judge the world through Jesus and has given proof of it by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31)
1. Do any of these give you an idea of how you might like to wrap up your initial presentation of the gospel? Choose one and state it in your own words and in a way that you think would communicate to people today? You can end your message in more than one way, but it may be helpful to choose one to use at first.

#### B. What questions or objections should I expect?

When we tell people about Jesus, we should not be surprised if they object to it. One common objection to the message in the first century was that the Christ shouldn't have to suffer. So we find the spokespersons addressing the sufferings of Christ multiple times (Acts 3:18; 17:3; 26:23; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:23). We can expect to encounter various objections to the message in our day too. For example, many people will say that ...

- *Jesus cannot be the only way to God or salvation.* Yet that is exactly what he claimed (John 14:6), and his followers also understood him to be the only way (Acts 4:12). God made an enormous sacrifice to provide a way for us to be saved, and we should be thankful for it, instead of questioning it. You may or may not like the idea that he is the only way, but we need to at least accept that this is what Jesus and his followers said.
- *I don't want Jesus to try to change me.* Change is difficult and uncomfortable, for sure, but unless we are everything a person ought to be, we need to change. Jesus made it plain that change is absolutely necessary (Matthew 18:1-5; Luke 5:36-39; 6:40). We have a choice about whether we submit to him as our King, but if we do acknowledge him as such, we must truly submit (Luke 6:46). If we believe Jesus is the rightful King, we will also trust that what he tells us is truly best.
- *The Christian message is judging me or judging other religions.* Yes it is, in a sense. God does not have a judgmental attitude, like many people have. But the fact is that God has appointed Jesus as the judge of all, and the judge of the universe has the right to judge us (John 5:22-24; 8:26; 12:47-50; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31).
- *If God is powerful and good, why do bad things happen? We know God sometimes works through bad things to bring about good (Romans 8:28). But we need to be careful about when and how we say this. We know God has worked that way in the past (James 1:2-4; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11), but we never know for sure what He may be doing in a particular situation today. Though we cannot explain why God allows evil, we can say that Jesus demonstrated through the miracles that he is more powerful than evil, but that it is not yet his will to totally destroy it (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). We need to be especially sensitive and compassionate about discussing this whole subject with people who have experienced tragedy. With them, **R**eflecting the Kingdom through empathy and **H**aving compassion may be the most important thing to do.*

2. Can you think of other things to say or Scriptures to help address any of these objections?

3. Are there other objections you have heard or expect to hear? What would you say in response to them?

Many of us are afraid of people's objections, and I still am sometimes. If a person raises an objection you can't answer, remember it is fine to say you'll have to think about it and get back to them. It is also fine to say, "I don't know," or even "I don't know, but I still believe Jesus is the King." We should also be aware that some people will raise side issues and questions as a way to avoid hearing the message because they don't want to hear.

I think we need to be as prepared as possible to answer objections, but I don't think our ability to answer objections is the main key to whether a person comes to faith. The two main keys are speaking the gospel message that is the power of God for salvation and the condition of the person's heart. So keep speaking and keep praying. That leads to the third matter I wanted to address:

C. What can I do besides addressing questions or objections?

When you have told the message and there are no objections, or when you have answered a person's objections, then what? There are still other important things to talk about, either at that time or in future conversations. Particularly, it is worth *delving deeper into any of the aspects of the basic gospel message*. Here are a few ideas of how you might do this:

- Jesus' ministry. One reason we include Jesus' ministry in the gospel message is that God attested to Jesus' identity by enabling him to do miracles (Acts 2:22; 10:38). So, you could delve into this more by reading some of your favorite miracle accounts. Some of mine are Mark 1:40-45; 2:1-12; 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 6:30-44. Reading accounts where Jesus **R**eflected the kingdom through his compassion and love for people are also valuable.

- Jesus' death. We've noted that God knew Jesus would be killed and that it was a part of God's plan (Acts 2:23-24). You may also want to show them that he died for our sins (1 Corinthians 14:3-5; Romans 5:8; Hebrews 9:15; 1 Peter 3:18). You might also want to explain to people what God did through Christ by teaching them Romans 3:21-26 and 5:6-11, along with the meaning of the key terms righteousness, justified, grace, redemption, atonement (propitiation), and reconciled.
- Jesus' resurrection. You could share with people that God's view of Jesus is in stark contrast with the human view of him by showing them the repeated contrast that "you (or they) killed him but God raised him from the dead" (Acts 2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39-40; 13:27-31). One important meaning of his resurrection, namely that he is the Son of God, is also clearly stated in Romans 1:1-4 (esp. v. 4, which goes on to call him both Christ and Lord). The parallel phrases in Romans 10:9 make the same point about his identity.
- Jesus' identity. This is the main point of the message, and you want to keep coming back to it over and over, no matter what other subjects you may be talking about. Keep tying things back to this most important point and praying that their hearts will be open to see it. His identity is communicated through various key terms such as Christ (or King), Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Prince, Savior, Judge, etc. All of these are terms of great authority. Research their meaning and find some key passages to share about them. Some other great passages that show Jesus' identity are Matthew 16:13-16; Mark 4:35-41; 9:2-9; John 4:1-26; 6:1-69; 9:1-41. Re-telling the basic story of Jesus doing miracles, being rejected, and then being raised from the dead is another great way to keep focusing on his identity.
- This is good news. Gospel means good news, and what God has done in Christ is good news for many reasons. We mentioned some of them on p. 65 (second half of the long paragraph), p. 66 (#4), and p. 68 (fourth paragraph). You should consider why it is good news to you personally and be ready to share that. You should also consider how Jesus may be especially good news to the person you are talking to in light of what you know about them personally (Do they especially need direction for their life? ... forgiveness? ... to be accepted? ... to be loved? etc.)
- The response God demands. The ones who told the message in Acts regularly called for *repentance* (3:19; 17:30; 26:20), *faith in Jesus* (10:43; 13:39; 16:31; cf. 17:12, 34; 18:8), and *being baptized* (Acts

2:38; 10:47-48; 22:16; cf. 8:12, 36-39; 18:8). You may want to go into more depth about the meaning of each of these.

- To believe in Jesus means to believe he is the Christ/King/Son of God, to believe he is the only way we can be saved from sin, and to trust him to the point that we obey him (John 8:24; Romans 1:5; 3:25; James 2:14-26).
- To repent is to change our hearts to the point that we change our lives, turning away from sin and ignoring God and toward taking him seriously (Matthew 4:17; Acts 20:21; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:8-13)
- To be baptized is to be immersed in water in the name of Jesus, believing that God will work through it to put our old sinful self to death and give us new life (John 3:22-23; Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 2:11-12).

If a few conversations with a person do not persuade them to submit to Christ, yet they still seem open, you might consider reading through one of the four Gospels and discussing it with them. Mark and John are especially well suited for this. Doing this will give you multiple opportunities to re-state the basic message of the gospel as well as to emphasize the key aspects of it mentioned above.

4. Which of the aspects of the message (pp. 96-98) above do you need to understand better? Choose a day or two this week and spend your entire quiet time with God exploring that aspect more. You can use the Scriptures above, others you can find, or ask someone for even more passages on that subject. Spending some time on it will help you personally and also help equip you to announce the news to others.

As mentioned, the information above may seem very detailed and irrelevant right now, but when you get to this situation with people, you will probably feel the need for some resources like these. Again, you may want to make a note somewhere to help you remember where this material is in case you need it down the road.

## Results

When the message of the kingdom is spoken, there will be a range of response. The parable of the sower shows this clearly. There will be misunderstanding, quick but temporary acceptance, acceptance that gets strangled out by thorns, and acceptance that bears fruit. I doubt Jesus intended to give us percentages, but it is noticeable that only a minority accepted the message and allowed it to change their lives.

The location of this parable in Matthew is significant. Before it, in Matthew 8-9, Jesus encountered a variety of people who were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. In the key passage upon which Empowering Subjects is based, Jesus said all those people constitute a vast harvest and that there is a great need for workers (9:35-38). He then equipped the twelve and sent them out as workers (Matthew 10). A part of the equipping was that he told them they would be welcomed by some, rejected by others and even persecuted.

After he sent out the twelve, he, too, went out to teach and preach (Matthew 11:1). Significantly, over the next two chapters, Jesus received the same mixed response he told the disciples they would receive. For example, in chapter 11, John the Baptist was confused about him, the people in many towns did not repent when he visited them, the wise and learned couldn't see his truths but the little children (humble people) could, and the weary and burdened were specifically invited to Him. Likewise in chapter 12, the Pharisees criticized him, the people in the synagogue looked for and found a reason to bring charges against him, a crowd followed him, the Pharisees falsely accused him, people demanded a sign from him, and his family wanted to speak to him (apparently thinking he's lost his mind, based on Mark's account). Again, the response to Jesus was mixed.

It is then, immediately after Jesus received these various responses, that the parable of the sower is recorded (Matthew 13). God is emphasizing to us, through this arrangement of the Scriptures, that there will be a wide range of response to the proclamation of the kingdom. We should not expect or try to bring about a "better" response than Jesus got. Rather, we should expect that, when we proclaim the message of the King and kingdom, people will respond in a similar variety of ways.

That is what happened in Acts as well. Take a few minutes to study the infographic on the next page, *How Non-Christians Responded to the Proclamation of Christ in Acts*. Look up some of the Scriptures on any points that you didn't know or that surprise you. Then move on to answer the questions that follow.

## How Non-Christians Responded to the Proclamation of Christ in Acts

Occasionally, there was no stated response (24:1-11), a moderate level of interest (17:16-21) or people wanted to hear more (13:42; 17:32). This last response gives us hope, and we should watch for it. For the most part, however, the response was:



### Acceptance

- Believed and were baptized
- From one to thousands of people

*Acts 2:41-47; 8:5-25, 26-40; 10:34-48; 11:19-21; 13:4-12; 43; 14:1; 16:11-15; 17:10-12; 18:7-11; 19:1-7*



### Mixed

- Some believed
- Others rejected

*Acts 14:1-7; 17:1-9, 32-34; 28:24*



### Rejection, usually with opposition or even persecution

- This response is found especially among the religious people (Jews), both the leaders and common people, but also by secular authorities (Romans).
- Some underlying emotions that are stated were jealousy (5:17; 13:45; 17:5), fear (24:25), anger (7:54) and being disturbed (4:2).

#### Forms the opposition took:

- Sneered (17:32)
- Maligned (19:9)
- Contradicted (13:45)
- Heaped abuse (13:45)
- Ordered them to stop speaking (4:17-18; 5:40)
- Tried to turn the hearers away (13:4-12)
- Found false witnesses (6:13)
- Plotted against them (14:4; 20:3; 23:12-13)
- Arrested / seized them (4:3; 5:18; 6:12; 16:19; 19:29)
- Interrogated them (4:7; 5:27; 6:12)
- Stirred up crowds against them, mobs, riots (13:49-50; 14:2; 16:19-24; 17:13-15; 19:23-41; 21:27)
- Flogged them (5:40; 16:23; cf. 22:24-25)
- Interrupted and...killed them (7:54-60), ...treated them like gods (14:8-18) or ...called them crazy (26:25).

### How the Apostles Responded to Rejection and Opposition



- Rejoiced (5:41) and prayed (4:23-31)
- Warned those who were rejecting the word (13:51; 18:6; 28:26-27; cf. Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:11)
- Continued to speak (4:31; 5:42; 14:7)
- Saw and made the most of another opportunity:
  - Often used their trial to proclaim Christ (Acts 4:1-12; 5:25-32; 6:12-7:60; 21:27-22:30; 25:13-26:32; Jesus said this would happen: Matthew 10:18-20)
  - Found other opportunities as well (16:25-34)
- Moved on to speak to others:
  - The Gentiles (13:46-48; 18:1-8; 19:8-10; 28:24-28)
  - Another town (8:1-4, 5-25; 14:19-21; 17:1-10, 11-15)





8. What would you do if you were telling the good news and someone interrupted you, sneered at you, and threatened you (Rejection with Opposition)?

When you think about results, remember to stay in your lane. Our job is not to convert people. *God* gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:5-7) and new life (John 6:63; Titus 3:5). Yes, we care, and we do our very best to persuade people to believe. In the end, though, it is up to *God's* work and the person's choice.

Practical Application (#1). Continue to *Prepare* by making sure you are clear about a way of announcing the good news of the kingdom, including how you would end your presentation (1. above).

Practical Application (#2). Make sure you are devoted to *Prayer* concerning the matters on the sheet in the front pouch of your notebook. Give special attention to praying for opportunities to announce the message.

Practical Application (#3). Keep preparing yourself with a mission briefing to *SHARE* the kingdom each time you leave your house.

Practical Application (#4). *Practice watchfulness* and *Probe* people's hearts and interest to see if *God* is answering your prayers for an opportunity. Decide now that, if *God* gives the opportunity, you will announce the news!

Practical Application (#5). Set aside a couple times to reflect on your day and jot down a few reflections about any of the applications above.