

What is Gospel Tell-and-Show?

Acts 13:4-12

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He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. . . Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. - Acts 13: 7 & 12, ESV

Grima Wormtongue is one of the truly despicable characters in literature. A magically empowered false counselor, he corrupts the mind, body and soul of King Theoden of Rohan before he is confronted and overthrown by Gandalf. Perhaps Bar-Jesus, the Jewish magician and counselor to Sergius Paulus, was part of Tolkien's inspiration for Wormtongue. He is certainly a despicable character, a magician fiercely opposed to the Gospel.

When Barnabas and Saul set out on their first missionary journey from Antioch, their first stop was the island of Cyprus. Cyprus sits right off the coast of Syria and Turkey and is a short sail from Antioch in Syria. As would be their regular pattern, they go first to the synagogues to preach Jesus to those who should have been most prepared to hear the message. Together, they then walk from Salamis to Paphos, literally from one end of the island to the other, preaching the Gospel.

It was in Paphos, after they had walked across Cyprus, that they encounter the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who is the Roman governor of the island. Sergius Paulus is intelligent and receptive to the Gospel, but he is being deceived by Bar-Jesus. As Bar-Jesus seeks to turn him away from the faith, Paul rebukes him in the power of the Holy Spirit, "*You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?*" And then Paul pronounces God's curse: "*And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.*"

Here we see Barnabas and Paul doing three things:

1. Proclaiming the Gospel.
2. Powerfully opposing deception which leads people away from the Gospel.
3. Demonstrating the power of God.

While we may not be apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit to do signs and wonders, we are still called to do the same three things as kingdom ambassadors of the Lord Jesus. We must proclaim the Gospel. We must clearly and powerfully oppose deception, which keeps people from the truth. Finally, we must demonstrate the power of the Gospel through actions that support the message of the Gospel. This is Gospel tell-and-show.

Some people like to quote Francis of Assisi, who said, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." Well, words are very necessary for preaching the Gospel, always. It is the word of Christ that brings faith. (Rom. 10:17) But words of positive proclamation are where our Gospel ministry begins, not where it ends. We must also reason and refute error by the word of God. Then, we must demonstrate the reality of the Gospel's power in our lives by our actions toward others. Over the centuries, Christians have done this by starting hospitals and schools, feeding the poor, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison, having compassion of those who suffer and loving their neighbors and their enemies.

May the Lord empower us by His Holy Spirit to imitate the apostles and engage in Gospel tell-and-show. Then, may He bless our efforts and glorify His name through the advance of the Gospel!