

The Discipline of Disciple-Making: How Should We Share the Gospel with the Rich, the Famous, & the Powerful?

Acts 24-26

Of the millions and millions and millions of people that lived before and during the time period of 15 centuries when God's Word was written, the vast majority are nameless. People were born, lived, and died without most of the rest of humanity before or after them even knowing their names. The Washington DC think tank called the Population Reference Bureau calculates that by the time of the first century over 40 billion humans had lived and died.¹

But there are almost 3,000 people that have found their way into God's Word. The Bible names exactly 2,938 people according to Wilbur M. Smith (1894-1976), a scholar from a generation ago. Why out of millions and billions of people, do we have almost three thousand lives mentioned? *God uses them to teach us something.*

As we return to Acts, starting in chapter 2 today, look at the individual people named, described, and used to unfold the amazing account God gave to us of the spread of the Gospel. As we pause to think a bit more deeply about what exactly it is that we are reading: *perfectly accurate accounts of the personal words, thoughts, and actions of people who lived 2,000 years ago.*

In the Book of Acts we are given an authorized record of the birth of the church and spread of the Gospel. This account is from God Himself. Acts is the perfect, flawless, account of the sequence of events capturing the power of the Gospel at work. But the 22 salvation-message presentations in Acts, recorded at God's request, are not an exhaustive record of every time the Gospel was shared: *these 22 are just the exact accounts that God wanted us to have.*

There were literally countless events going on in those first years of the church, just because of the sheer number of lives being touched by God.

THINK OF THE NUMBERS

There were thousands of born-again believers at a minimum, during the first week of the birth of the church.

We get that from the numbers God chooses to share in the record in Acts. First, Acts 2:41 tells us that God counted hearts and reported that 3,000 were saved. Next, we get an updated count in Acts 4:4 where God says that 5,000 **men** was the cumulative number of those saved.

¹ <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx>

So with the count system used in other accounts like in the Four Gospels, that would mean some of those men were actually family units. So we could say that the Church was made up of 5,000 family units of all sizes. Finally, we know from 1 Cor. 15:6, that there were already 500 solid believers from Christ's ministry, that Jesus Christ personally met with in those 40 days prior to His Ascension, ten days prior to Pentecost.

That means that by Acts chapter 4, there were perhaps 10,000 or even double that, of men, women, and children in Jerusalem and outlying areas, who were Spirit-filled, and quite enthused: believers.

Now, with that large number in mind, pause and:

THINK OF THAT INITIAL SURGE OF EXCITED SHARING

Acts records the ground floor events of the launch of greatest event in history.

Jesus was alive.

Multitudes were being powerfully transformed by Him.

God was mightily at work.

Acts is God's account of how He kept the work of Pentecost going. Thus we see in Acts, and find later explained in Paul's Epistles, God's plan that stretches to us today. What was the bottom line?

God first saves people, and then energizes them, and then God continues to re-energize those early believers. They, like all of us, continued after they were saved to face hostility, adversity, weariness, and normal life struggles. The bottom line is that:

GOD WAS AT WORK IN HIS CHURCH

What does God do to keep His Church moving, sharing, and reflecting His glory? In Acts 4 the newly saved individuals, are described as being re-filled with the power, joy, and boldness of the Spirit after the first persecution comes to the leaders of the newly formed church. Look at that event in Acts 4:1-4; 21:

Acts 4:1-21 (NKJV) Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees **came upon them**, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And **they laid hands on them**, and **put them in custody** until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. 21 So **when they had further threatened**

them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.

So what happens to the regular believers after their leaders are arrested and threatened? Look at Acts 4:23-24:

Acts 4:23-24 (NKJV) And **being let go**, they **went to their own companions** and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, **they raised their voice to God with one accord** and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

So, the Apostles came to those they were close to, they prayed, and now watch what comes next. Move onward to Acts 4:31-33 and as we see this amazingly instructive note that God gives us about not just the Apostles, this was an assembly of other believers, **please stand with me** as we read:

Acts 4:31-33 (NKJV) And when they had **prayed**, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they **were all filled with the Holy Spirit**, and **they spoke the word of God with boldness**. 32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And **great grace was upon them all**.

Note several observations we can glean from this passage:

They suffered.

They prayed.

God shook the place they assembled.

Then what happened?

HOW DOES GOD KEEP HIS CHURCH WORKING?

Was there another outpouring of tongues-speaking reported again in Jerusalem? No, once the Church was born in Acts 2, there is never another tongues-speaking event in Jerusalem, ever mentioned by God, in His Word.

Let that sink in for a moment.

If there was ever a time to pour on the best way to get the message out it would be now.

These moments were like the D-Day of the Gospel. It was time to spread out, conquer for Christ, and get as many impacted as possible with the power of God unto salvation.

Instead, what does God tell us was the manifestation of His power in those early believers lives after He shook the building where they gathered? What did God do to them?

God re-filled them with His Spirit.

God empowered them to speak His Word with boldness.

God poured out upon all of them His great grace. That means:

GOD KEEPS ORCHESTRATING THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

These thousands are further described in Acts 8:1-4 where it is stated that they:

Acts 8:1-4 (NKJV) Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose **against the church which was at Jerusalem**; and they **were all scattered** throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. 4 Therefore **those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.**

All that to say there must have been an immense amount of activity going on with soul-winning, discipleship, worship, ministry, church gatherings, and so much more. But out of that whirlwind of events, and that immense cloud of individuals all touched and moved by the Spirit of God: the book of Acts has only the lives of the people, and the accounts of their lives that God wanted us to know.

There are so many stories of lives we have no final chapter. Part of the wonder of Heaven will be to see what happened to all these amazing believers we know nothing more about:

How did God use **Nicodemus** after he believed, help bury Christ, and then saw Him risen?

How did **Joseph of Arimathaea** get to see God at work as he described the tomb Christ borrowed for one weekend that changed Joseph's and the world's eternal destiny?

What else did **Barnabas** do, and **John Mark**, all those **women** who ministered to Christ, and **Cornelius** who was from Italy and most likely went back. These are just a handful of the thousands Christ touched. Each were filled with the same Spirit of God. Each were empowered and served.

But God only tells us as much as He does about each life so we can learn what He wants us to know. The rest is left for the end when God reveals all that everyone did for Him, but that is yet future. We are to learn, understand, and go with what we have before us.

That is the backdrop for all of these presentations of the Gospel we have been studying. Now we come to Acts 24.

SALVATION IS: FOLLOWING THE WAY OF WORSHIPPING GOD

MESSAGE TWENTY (Paul): The next Gospel Presentation is in Acts 24:14-27, where salvation is described as a Way of Worship, that involves righteousness, self-control, and averts judgment; and that message makes the lost to fear.

Acts 24:14-16; 24-25 (NKJV) But this I confess to you, that **according to the Way** which they call a sect, so **I worship the God** of my fathers, **believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets**. 15 I have **hope in God**, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a **resurrection of the dead**, both of the just and the unjust. 16 This being so, **I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men**. 24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, **he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ**. 25 Now as he **reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come**, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

WHO DID PAUL WITNESS TO?

Real quick look with me at v. 24, do you notice a couple of names there? First we have Felix, and secondly we have Drusilla. Who were they anyway? This is where a good study Bible is so helpful. The MacArthur Study Bible gives short bios²?

Felix: Governor of Judea from A.D. 52 to 59. Felix was a former slave whose brother (a favorite of Emperor Claudius) had obtained for him the position as governor. He was not highly regarded by the influential Romans of his day and accomplished little during his term as governor. He defeated the Egyptian and his followers (see note on 21:38), but his brutality angered the Jews and led to his ouster as governor by Emperor Nero two years after Paul's hearing (v. 27).

Drusilla: The youngest daughter of Agrippa I (**note the family tree chart**), and Felix's third wife. Felix, struck by her beauty, had lured her away from her husband. At the time of Paul's hearing, she was not yet 20 years old.

So Paul was facing a teenaged, fabulously wealthy woman who was living in moral decadence, in the midst of the land of the Bible, surrounded by the birth of Christ's Church and untouched by the message of salvation. Plus a man of poverty who meteorically rose to power, and got what he wanted despite the rules and costs.

So, the rich, famous, and powerful of the day are seated, Paul is given the platform to speak. Think of it as being like having a combination of Miley Cyrus, Lindsey Lohan, and Paris Hilton morphed into one 19 year old, who is married to someone with Michael Jackson's fame and influence: and YOU get to share a testimony of Christ. What would you say?

² MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 1679). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

As a guide, God gives us the elements of salvation that Paul weaves into his witness, they are:

Believers follow a new Way, it is Christ who is our way;

Believers worship God;

Believers trust all of God's Word;

Believers hope in God;

Believers believe in resurrection and judgment to come;

Believers live a changed life; and

Believers explain that faith in Christ involves righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come.

The short version of what Paul shared would be that it is:

HARD TO BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Thus Paul gives not an easy to believe, "try Jesus" message! Note the audience that hears Paul's message. Paul is facing pagans, steeped in sin, lost and doomed men and women. What does he tell lost people?

A message about Christ & salvation that makes it hard to believe, because it involves, conviction, confession, repentance, and life-change.

So how does Paul do personal evangelism with big shots, who have sordid lives? He hits them with God's Word, God's Law, God's Holiness, and their utter failure to meet His standard.

Note what Paul says in Acts 24:25 righteousness, self-control, and the judgment.

1. **People need to be told that** God demands perfection; and only perfect people are allowed into Heaven because of God's perfect holiness. The standard we share, as God's representatives, is that perfect "**righteousness**" is needed by all humans. Then we share the bad news that there is none righteous, not even one. Then we point them to Christ the source of perfect, imputed righteousness. (Mt. 5:48; Rom. 3:10; 2 Cor. 5:21)
2. **People need to be told that** God demands that for people to conform to His absolute standard, it require they begin to live with "**self-control**." This self-control comes not from an outward restraint imposed by others, but by an inward change prompted by God's grace (Titus 2:11-13).
3. **People need to be told that** for anyone that fails to exhibit self-control and to conform oneself to God's righteous standard is (apart from salvation) "judgment." They will be required to stand before God and answer for every evil deed seen and unseen.

What is the result of this type of evangelism that makes it “hard to believe” instead of so easy that no one could refuse the offer?

WAS PAUL AFRAID OF OFFENDING FELIX & DRUSILLA?

Felix was afraid. We know from history that Felix was living with this woman Druscilla, that he had lured away from her husband. Felix was convicted by the clear presentation of God’s standards that he had an obvious lack of “righteousness”; and lived with no moral “self-control.”

When Felix realized that he might have to face the “judgment” of God, this thought alarmed him. The result was no quick conversion, instead Felix hastily dismissed Paul.

Note what he says at the end of this verse: **when I have a convenient time.** That convenient time probably never came. Felix rejected his momentary conviction, the fear of God passed. Felix foolishly hardened his heart, pushed away the convicting work of the Spirit, and passed up what may have been his only opportunity to repent.

As the writer of Hebrews notes: while you hear His voice, don’t harden your hearts!

Back to where we started: how does God want to keep us boldly proclaiming His Word?

HOW DOES GOD KEEP HIS CHURCH WORKING?

By re-energizing us by re-filling us with His Spirit.

What did God do to them?

God re-filled them with His Spirit.

God empowered them to speak His Word with boldness.

God poured out upon all of them His great grace.

Why not invite the Lord to come and take over again, every part of your life with these words:

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.