

X. The Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia: God's Church for the Ages
"His Salvation – Our Proclamation"
Acts 2:42–47
Dr. Harry Reeder
May 1, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Acts 2:42-47 says **42** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

The grass withers, the flower fades. The Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

There were some things we needed to handle this morning in the light of God's Providence and therefore this has to be somewhat abbreviated so I want to get to it very quickly. I have a great burden for my country, my community, and the world but I know God has called me to the world to start where I am at home. If I could take you through the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, and church history there is one thing that is obvious. Whenever God changes a culture He does it with the Gospel. He doesn't do it with legislation that can restrain sin but it can't transform hearts. He doesn't do it with mechanisms or cosmetically. He changes people from the inside out and when He changes them from the inside out cultures change. But cultures only change when people are changed and the only thing that will change people is the Gospel. Wherever the Gospel has gone with the Great Awakening, always, invariably, I don't know of an exception, Jesus does His work in the world through His church and His church that is His people, bound together under the Lordship of Christ, with all the marks of that which is His church, must be vibrant and vigorous and alive.

I believe we're making gigantic mistake and I wished I had more time to go over it with you but I want to go ahead and get it out. Feel free to talk to me about it. I believe that as the church has lost its impact in our culture we have come to the conviction our best way to reach people is on a Sunday morning worship service. Therefore Sunday morning worship has become all kinds of things and not necessarily worship. There is worship going on but not necessarily worship of God. The idea is to win people to Christ. I believe that's a mistake. Do not hear me say this. I am not saying 'can I bring my lost friends to church?' Absolutely bring them. Will they hear the Gospel? Yes, unflinchingly and thoughtfully they will hear it. Will they be invited to Christ? Yes, but we are not going to win the world by what we do in these four walls but by what we do when we leave these four walls. That's what is going to win the world.

I think we're making three mistakes. We believe it's when the church is gathered is when we're going to evangelize the world and we're dead wrong. It's when the church is scattered is when we evangelize the world. Secondly, I believe we think programs will

evangelize people. They won't. People evangelize people. Thirdly, we're going to wait for the professionals to do it, the preacher. That's what we pay them for. Dan Alison has my favorite line when he does an evangelism explosion clinic. He says, "With most of us our plan to evangelize our people is to memorize our pastor's phone number." Now if you're talking to somebody and you need to call me please do but you don't have to call me. If you know Jesus as Savior you know enough to tell people how to get to Him. If you run up against a brick wall or get a brick thrown at you then call me because I can get hit with bricks great. I love that but it's not the pastor's that do it but it's the people that do it. It's not the programs that do it but the people that do it. It's not within these four walls that it's going to get done but it's when we go out and scatter that it's going to get done.

Therefore this issue of personal evangelism, person to person, is crucial. There won't be an awakening without a revived church. When a church is revived in its everyday life it's constantly disseminating the Gospel through the mouthpieces of its members. That is what is happening. When Charles Finney desired a great awakening he made this comment, "We don't have a great awakening because we don't have a revival." He's right. Then he said, "We don't have a revival because the church doesn't want a revival." He's partially right. Jonathan Edwards, a century before where we did have a Great Awakening, had it right when he said "We're not going to have a Great Awakening without a revived church and we don't have a revived church because we don't want God because when the church wants God then it gets revived." It can want revival and not want God. God will take you on our terms but when you want God you come to Him on His terms and when the church wants God then it comes alive. When it comes alive it not only has God centered worship but it has the aggressive, intentional, thoughtful, compassionate, insightful work of evangelism that goes on day after day after day.

Jonathan Edwards made this other point and said, "There's no element more powerful in the Great Awakening than stories of sinners being converted to Christ and what it did to those whom God used to lead them to Christ." In other words, he is saying the thing that fuels it are the stories of those coming to Christ by those being led by Christ and that becomes contagious and multiplies continually. This did so much so that it gave birth to our nation. In 1755 this statement was made; "It looks like the whole world has gone to church." Do you know what they really were saying? It looks like the church has gone into the whole world. They said that everyday had become a Sunday. Those are absolute quotes that they made then. It was because those who gathered for worship on Sunday were bringing the message of Sunday into everyday. The whole world has gone to church! Why? It was because the whole church was going into the world for Christ. That's why.

I want to remind you that we're in this series on the church and it's not cosmetics or mechanistic or exotic but it's we as a church want to stay on track going to the next level. Therefore remember this. All Great Awakenings recorded in Scripture or history have been delivered by the Spirit of God through vibrant churches marked by God centered worship, intercessory prayer, powerful preaching, deeds of mercy, love and justice and personal evangelism characterized by joy, thoughtfulness, and boldness. You don't run over people in the name of boldness and in the name of thoughtfulness you're not silent. Eventually you are sharing the Gospel thoughtfully, with boldness and it's

coming out of a people who gather in the context of the local church and as they're gathering together they are noted for God centered worship and intercessory prayer. They are Gospel driven, Christ centered, Spirit filled and as God is filling them up they are overflowing into the lives of everybody else that are around them.

So we have taken the time to say for coming generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled equipping church, discipling Christ followers to embrace four crucial ministries of spiritual vitality: worship, evangelism, loving one another, and learning. That's what God has called us to do. The one we are looking at in this sermon is this matter of evangelism where God has called us to share the Gospel with other people.

I met with the deacons this past week at about 8:30pm this last Tuesday night after I had met with the elders. We were talking about the future and Briarwood and I was sharing with them some things and they asked me some questions. I shared with them how I pray that God would continue to grow us in our ability to share the Gospel, live the Gospel and to give Gospel deeds and Gospel words where people feel the impact of the Gospel and they hear the words of the Gospel so that they can come to Christ because faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. As I was talking about that little did I know that as I was headed home and within a couple of hours those same people and other people were going to be called to the task of showing Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice and all of these storms and tornados began to hit.

Illustrations after illustration were coming to me. That's just the preacher in me. They are shouting out. What's the watchman on the wall? What's the wall today for us? It's the media. That's how you get to everybody. The media is telling everybody to listen to the siren. Go to a safe place. Certain destruction is coming. Get to a safe place. Nobody was embarrassed. Everybody is shouting it out. There is something coming that you want to avoid. Get to a safe place. They stood on the wall and they shouted it. I couldn't help but think as horrendous as that is, as horrific as that is, that pails into absolute insignificance compared to the end of time and the judgment seat and we have the siren. We have the wall to stand on. We have the message where we need to say "There is only one safe place in that day and that is Jesus Christ!" Why will we not speak?

We call people, we lay hold of people, we grab people. We get on the television when a temporal storm comes that once it's passed we deal with those issues but there is an eternity that's coming and once eternity is here, there is no after thought that can be made. If you learned anything else this week, did you not learn man does not know his time? Man does not know his time but it is the day of salvation and God uses a people who share the Gospel. I want to be absolutely clear with you. I know God is going to save all of His people. I believe Jesus when He said, "Father all whom You have given Me I lose not one but will raise them up on the last day." So Briarwood as a church, you and I as individuals, may decide to be silent and not warn people of the wrath to come or the love of grace that's found in Jesus Christ and that there's a safe place for your soul, your heart, and One who will transform your life beginning now and take you into all eternity but God will get His work done and we'll miss out on it. We will be the ones who miss out on it if we're silent. So I want to encourage you that it's not the professional, or the church gathered but it's the church scattered through its people proclaiming the Gospel.

I want to show you this in Acts 8. The church at Jerusalem is supposed to go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the utter most part of the world. The church is growing and it's at 3,000, then 5,000 and everyday people are being saved but how is this going to get to the world? It's not by evangelizing simply when the church gathers in the temple courtyard at Jerusalem but when it scatters. Acts 8:1-8 says *1 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. 4 Now those who were scattered (The every day Christians) went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.*

Judea, then Samaria and then the whole world gets turned upside down. Why? It was because the church scattered. The salt got out of the salt shaker. The church scattered. It moved out and everywhere they went they bore witness of Christ. By God's grace we need to be Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled but as we're Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled, reaching up in worship, reaching in in love and reaching down in learning, we have to reach out intentionally with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying that everyone who lost their lives in the recent storms in Alabama was a Christian because I don't know that but everyone I've talked to who lost someone in their family nearby were believers. Two things struck me when I heard that. One, praise the Lord. Two, if they were Christians then one thing I know is that somebody had been to them with the Gospel. I don't know who it was but if they were Christians I know they didn't get to be a Christian by standing in a corner. I know they didn't become a Christian by sitting down and contemplating their navel. Somebody brought them the Gospel. Faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. Somebody came and shared with them the Good News.

That's what happened here in Acts 8. Philip went to Samaria. Then he went and led an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ out in the wilderness. He went back and started a whole church back in Ethiopia. Then he goes to Caesarea Philippi and sets up operations and starts preaching everywhere. Peter goes out and shares the Gospel. He goes to Samaria and follows up on what Philip is doing. He goes to Joppa and shares the Gospel all over there with Simon the Tanner, raising Dorcas up. Then he goes to share the Gospel at Caesarea by the Sea and a Roman Centurion comes to Christ. Now the Gospel is going from the Jew to the Gentile. They went around sharing the Gospel to everyone, speaking this all around them.

I have seven thoughts on evangelism. The first one is when you share the Gospel personal evangelism is intentional yet responsive. It's not serendipity – "I wonder if I'm going to get the chance to share the Gospel?" No, we get up and we seek the lost. Do you remember the woman who lost the coin? What did she do? Did she say "I sure hope it shows up"? No, she got down on her knees to look for it. She lit a lamp. She brushed the floor looking for it. We are intentional about evangelism yet responsive. When we

move intentionally in evangelism we always want to be open. What are the Divine opportunities that God has given to us in that moment?

The second thought is evangelism is thoughtful yet passionate. It's not simply an intellectual, philosophical exercise. It's passionate. We are passionate for people to know Christ yet we're thoughtful. We are taking a look at their life. What's my point of contact with them? Where can the bridge of the Gospel land in their life? How can I minister to them? How can I talk with them? It's thoughtful yet passionate. It's intentional yet responsive.

The third thought is evangelism is relational yet it's directed. We treat people with respect. They aren't like a target we have on them and not take the time to treat them as people. We treat them with dignity, respect, care, kindness and love so that we are relational but direct about this. The point isn't simply for me to have another friend because being my friend isn't going to get me into heaven. I'm going to be friendly, treat them with respect and civility but I want them to know Jesus who is a friend to sinners forever and saves them.

The fourth thought is evangelism is conversational yet informative. Sometimes I think in evangelism we feel the burden of "Hey you're lost and you need to be saved and do it now. What are you waiting on?" I have an uncle who did it this way. I've been killed but he just leads people to Christ all over the place but by in large learn to be conversational. Ask questions. Have you ever noticed how many times Jesus asked questions? My favorite way to do it is to ask questions on an airplane. I found people are very open to talk about things of eternity on a plane. So when I get on the plane I pray for some turbulence, not a whole lot but just enough to shake a baggage rack or two and when that happens I turn to the person next to me and say "Do you think there's a heaven?" God has put eternity in the heart of a man. Everybody says "yes" to that question. Later on they may tell me they are an atheist but on that first question they always say "yes." How do you think you get there? Everybody has an opinion and they think you deserve to hear it so just go ahead and ask questions.

Be conversational yet informative because there's something you have to communicate. We are lost. Our religion can't save us. Our resolve can't save us. God is a holy God and we can't be right with Him except through the Way that He has provided. He found a Way for us to be right with Him. He sent His Son to die for our sins and He rose again. If you'll turn from your sins and put your trust in Him you can have eternal life. Perhaps you're reading this today and you haven't done that yet. What a great day to do it. There's a safe place for your soul. Hang on for the rest of your life because it's going to be an unbelievable ride but you're safe in Christ. You are secure through the storms of life and into eternity.

The fifth thought is evangelism is effusive yet purposeful. Have you ever notice who are the most effective evangelists? It is new Christians. Do you know why? They are still amazed at grace. They haven't gotten used to it yet so they just go tell people. They haven't become so concerned for themselves that they are more worried about being embarrassed than sharing Christ with somebody so they just go sharing Christ all over the place. They will share it with their golfing buddies, their work friends, their classmates, their teammates and whoever will listen. It's like the blind man and they told him, "Jesus didn't do that." And the blind man said, "The only thing I know is that once I was blind and now I see and He did it." There is this overflow of the Gospel of Jesus

Christ. Just keep priming the pump and loving the Gospel of Jesus. Stay focused on Christ and as He fills your soul it begins to overflow out intentionally, thoughtfully, passionately, and conversationally.

The sixth thought is evangelism is a process yet be patient and get engaged. Here are some people who are saved and stepped into eternity and therefore I know somebody must have talked to them and I believe probably more than one person talked with them. Sometimes you're planting, sometimes you're watering and God gives the increase. Remember, conversion is God's work not ours. We don't have to convert anybody. In fact, our converts aren't going to make it too far. We are to share the Gospel and point people to Jesus. God converts. We just plant, water, cultivate and many times we're given the privilege to reap the one into eternity by praying with them.

The seventh thought and final thought is evangelism is persuasive yet prayerful. Remember when King Agrippa was talking about the Apostle Paul? He said, "Paul almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." That tells me that Paul knew that King Agrippa couldn't become a Christian by Paul's persuasion. Paul knew that God had to open his eyes and his ears but I also know that Paul knew that he wasn't about a mere dry, intellectual discourse about the Gospel and the philosophy of life. Paul was passionate and he said to him, "King Agrippa, I would that you would be like me except for these chains that you would know Christ as Lord and Savior." Here is Paul's passion when he said "I would be accursed that my brethren might know Christ." He had his passion for people to know and love and serve Christ.

Here is the takeaway. The inescapable fact is that nothing transforms men and women, marriages, families or cultures other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is designed to be shared and delivered personally. It has been designed. Why don't we do it? I think sometimes we don't do it because we're afraid. We are afraid of being embarrassed, rejected or even ostracized but just stay focused on Christ and the love of Christ will erase all of those fears. Get engaged. That's one of the reasons we have a Bridge to Life series.

There is a takeaway for you. Take Bridge to Life so that you can have this core ability to conversationally share the Gospel with people. I think that helps. Know the Gospel. Be trained in sharing the Gospel and then just start doing it. I remember when I was kid just seven years old, one Christmas my dad announced to me that he had bought a bike. That surprised me and I found out that my grandparents went in on it. That year for Christmas I got a bike, a tangerine, and I think a couple of pecans or something. We didn't have the finances to get me a bike each year I grew so this was my bike for life. So at seven years old I received a 27 inch JC Higgins bike and my feet could barely reach the peddles. We lived in the Calhoun Apartments in North Charleston and it had a dirt road. I can still remember my dad behind me pushing and huffing and puffing and then I'd say "Don't let go, don't let go." He'd push some more and then finally after he showed me everything about the bike he said "Learn to ride."

I visited the Calhoun Apartments about four or five years ago when they were tearing them down and went and looked at the two trees that I used to learn to ride my bike. I would put that bike up against one tree and I would push off and peddle to the next tree. I would grab it to stop myself and then I'd get off and turn the bike around and go back to the tree I just came from. I'll never forget the big day that I went from the tree out and then go to another tree. It was just little by little by little by little. Just start

sharing Christ where you play, where you work, with your friends. God will use you. The power is not in you. The power is in the Gospel.

I think I've shared this before but here's a great evangelistic tool in more ways than one. When I was about 16 years old the Alliance Youth Fellowship had a retreat in Asheboro, North Carolina and my dad told me that I was going to go to this retreat. I said, "Dad, I don't want to go. Please Dad, don't make me go." Things in my home weren't a democracy but pure monarchy. Dad was king. He said, "You're going." I thought it was just going to be a retreat but when I got there I found out it was a time they used to train people for evangelism. They had called the parents and said, "If you don't think your kids know Christ be sure and send them. We'll train them how to do evangelism." My dad said, "I think he needs it!" Yeah, what a great way to evangelize, train somebody to evangelize. God used that in my life.

When I found out they were doing evangelistic training I had to learn the Gospel. Then a college student took me out to evangelize with this other girl. I wasn't a Christian then but I had a prayer life. We got out of the car to go to the first door and you wouldn't believe the prayers I sent up to heaven. "Oh God, please let nobody be home, please, let nobody be home." No one was home on that first one. The second one a lady comes to the door and says "Hey my husband is here so come in and talk with us." The college student starts sharing the Gospel with them and I'm listening to what he's saying. He gets to the end and says to me "Hey Ike, why don't you finish?" So I stammered and talked and shared what I had learned the college student said to the man, "Sir now that you have heard that would you like to become a Christian?" He said, "I sure would, can I pray with ya'll?" He said, "Let's do it."

Why am I telling you that story? Number one that was part of God working in my life where eventually I'd become a Christian and number two I found out that the power is in the Gospel not me. I wasn't even saved and God used the Gospel from my lips for someone to come to know Jesus Christ. God has called us here to personally evangelize. I promise I'm available. Memorize my phone number. We'll have programs and we'll do concerts, we'll have Christmas, Easter, picnics and all kinds of things and every time we gather we'll share the Gospel with all your friends and family that you bring here. But if you want to see this world changed it won't be changed without people changing. The only thing that will change people is the Gospel and it's designed to be delivered through you.

I want to share one more story with you. I made a call this week checking on people who recently went through this latest storm. This family who are not members of Briarwood was sharing with how the doors were opened. They were watching the television as they saw the storm being tracked. They knew Tuscaloosa like the back of their hand. They knew as they watched the track of the storm that it was headed for the apartment building of their two sons. They immediately got on the phone with them and the mother goes to hear knees praying for God's grace to be upon her two sons while the father calmly asked them questions "Where are you? What's going on? Now son, here's what I want you to do. I want you to walk out the door with your brother and get under the crawl space. That's the place for you to go. Son, go now." They went and the storm goes over them. The cell connection was not lost and the parents heard the storm going over. The two sons lived through it.

Again, I cannot help but think here we are. God by no means will leave the guilty unpunished. The soul that sinneth will surely die but there is a safe haven. Will you not go tell people where you work and where you live? We'll train you but I don't think it's simply that you love people that you'll do it. It's when you love Jesus that you'll do it because you want them to know Him who has loved you and saved you. May the love of Christ fill us to overflowing. God preach the Gospel. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Thank You for the Lord Jesus our Savior. Thank You Father that we might trust in You with all of our heart. If you have not made that trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior would you please do that today? Please come talk with anyone here at the church. We would love to help you walk with the One who saves you from your sins who is Jesus Christ the Lord of glory. Father, I thank You that when we gather we can invite people to Christ. Now Father, send Your church into the world so that the world doesn't just go to church but they come to Christ because we've brought Christ to them. I pray in Jesus' Name, the Name above all names, the glad tidings, Gospel Name, Jesus that we publish, Amen.

The Briarwood Mission

“Our Purpose”

For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

The Briarwood Vision

“Our Passion”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister and a missionary.

The Briarwood Strategy

“Our Ministry”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood will prayerfully seek to Implement the Biblical strategy of:

1. Gospel Evangelism and Disciple-making
2. Gospel Church Planting and Church Revitalization
3. Gospel Deeds of Love, Mercy and Justice
4. Gospel Leaders Developed and Deployed