

VIII. Christ's Church in Biblical Perspective
The Ekklesia—Seven Distinctives
“#4: Personal Evangelism and Small-Group Discipleship”
Selected Texts from the book of Acts
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
November 19, 2017 • Evening Sermon

I'd like to start by looking at Acts 5. I would like to affirm this passage as one of my two favorite passages in the book of Acts. My first are 13 words that are found in Acts 17:6b and they are “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.” These words were uttered by an adversary, a frustrated opponent of Christ, the Gospel and the Kingdom, in less than 25 years after the ascension of Jesus. When I hear an opponent say these 13 words, it fires me up, because one the world wasn't turned upside down it was turned right side up and two, I love to think of what turned the world upside down, who did that and how the world was turned upside. Now it is one thing when your friends say good things about you but when your adversaries say things that is something else. Here is a pagan, an adversary, who is totally frustrated and he makes this 13 word statement.

Having said that there is another passage that is similar. The Gospel goes to Jerusalem in Acts 1 through 8. It goes to Judea and Samaria in Acts 9 through 12. Then it goes to the world in Acts 13 through 28 and out in the world someone says they have turned the world upside down. There was also something interestingly said back in Jerusalem when the Gospel was permeating, penetrating and saturating Jerusalem and that's the passage I want to read for this study. Let's look at Acts 5 and here the Apostles have been arrested in which afterward an interesting comment is made.

Acts 5:27–29 says [27] *And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, [28] saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” [29] But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”*

So here is the back story to what has happened here. They were arrested and after they had been freed they were instructed to quit proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So we they went out, guess what they did? They proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So they arrest them again and they say ‘Did we not tell you not to do that?’ They respond by saying ‘we obey authorities unless the authorities give us a command that would cause us to transgress the greater authority and that's God. In that case we must obey God rather than man. That's why we continue to preach the Gospel.’

The comment that was made here that I would love to be able to here again is when they said ‘*you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching*’ which was the Gospel. I would love to fill Birmingham with this teaching. How do we do this? I'll confess that I would love to see the sanctuary filled but I believe the way sanctuaries get filled is that the people that are in them fill the city with the Gospel.

We have looked at three distinctives of Christ's church that is alive, robust and healthy. So now we come to a fourth distinctive which is personal evangelism. I will be giving an opening overview to this because I plan to focus on this distinctive for the next one to two years. Personal evangelism and small group discipleship marks a church that is healthy. So here is the acronym I have come up with. It's LEAD – Lifestyle Evangelism And Discipleship.

I am not saying your lifestyle is evangelism. Evangelism is not simply a life lived well for Christ but it requires the words of the Gospel to be shared with people. When I say ‘lifestyle evangelism’ I mean that we develop lifestyles in which we are always evangelizing. We are always personally engaged in sharing the Gospel with friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and all those around us in multiple ways and fill the city with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After you evangelize you enfold them into the body of Christ in general but specifically into small group discipleship.

One of the ways we will look at this fourth distinctive is by going through the Gospel of John and show you the personal evangelism of Jesus through His encounters. There are seven of them that I hope to look specifically at in this coming year that enumerates Jesus sharing the Gospel. When we look at these encounters you will see as Jesus evangelizes how He draws them into small group discipleship.

Here’s the way we do evangelism and discipleship. We invite people to come to Jesus and then we try to figure out after they have prayed to receive Jesus, how we going to get them into small group discipleship. Have you ever noticed that Jesus never had a plan to do that or at least it seems that way and He never seemed to have an issue of people making a personal commitment to Jesus without going into discipleship? I think it has to do with the way Jesus shared the Gospel. It wasn’t ‘come to Me and then later on I’ll talk with you about following Me.’ No, when He shared the Gospel it included the call to follow – come to Me and follow Me. Then how would He teach them the principles of following Him? It was discipleship. When you do good discipleship people will be trained to share Christ with other people. So evangelism and discipleship are the couplets that go together and work together.

The Great Commission is found in Matthew 28:18–20 and it says [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Before Jesus said this He asked His Disciples to meet Him at the mountain and when they met Him at the mountain they worshipped Him.

The imperative of this commission is our mission of the church. There are many good things we can be involved in and many consequential blessings of the church when it fulfills its mission. Its mission is to make disciples and that’s the imperative. The imperative is not ‘go’ or ‘baptize’ or ‘teach’ but the imperative verb of making disciples is modified by three adverbs – going, baptizing and teaching. To make disciples we go to seek and save the lost. Then as you have sought them and brought them to Christ you enfold them in the church. They are baptized. Believers and their household were baptized and added to the church and drawn into the enfolding process of becoming followers of Christ, specifically in small group discipleship which I will begin to show you in this study.

Then what happens? After you are discipled then you start getting equipped. What do we equip people to do? We equip them to observe, embrace, and engage in obedience, everything that Jesus taught us. So when you bring the Gospel to them and the Gospel brings them to Christ to follow Him then you enfold them into the body of Christ. One of the things you do is put them in small group discipleship so that the third thing can be done and that is teaching them, to observe all He has command you. This is equipping them in discipleship. What is the result? We see it in the text. They worshipped Him. So to make disciples we evangelize, enfold, equip and they become those who exalt God with Word and life in worship.

So how does all this take place in discipleship? I will go to when they started practicing this. They started doing the Great Commission in the book of Acts. So I will be going to some selected verses to undergird what we are going to be preaching and teaching in the next one to two years under the series of LEAD – Lifestyle Evangelism And Discipleship in small groups. So let's now look at Acts 1. I would like for you to follow the process with me and then I will give a summation.

Acts 1:6–9 says [6] *So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* [7] *He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* [9] *And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.*

Jesus is getting ready to ascend back to glory, having accomplished the work of redemption at the cross, now has had the 40 days of teaching, as He is finishing His discipleship work with the 11, with Matthias soon to be added as the 12th, having already given them the Great Commission and whenever God gives you a command that is impossible He always gives you the resources that makes the possible achievable. The resource He will give is the Holy Spirit and that's how they will make disciples of all the nations. When He gives the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will give them power.

How do you know when someone is filled with the Holy Spirit? Certainly, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in their life and they will have spiritual gifts but Jesus says when His Spirit is poured out upon you 'You will be My witnesses.' You know where the Holy Spirit is when Jesus is being lifted up and that is what He has come to do. The power received by the Spirit will then be used to exalt Christ. The Disciples will not only be His witnesses but they will be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to the utter most part of the world. Again, we see where they went to all these places in the book of Acts.

By the way, God uses His church to do this and there are key churches that we see in the book of Acts. There is the church of Jerusalem in Acts 1 through 8. There is the church at Antioch in Acts 9 through 12 and then there is the key church in Ephesus which is the key church in reaching the world. God uses leaders to do this as well for He uses Peter in Acts 1 through 8. He uses Peter and Paul in Acts 9 through 12 and He uses Paul surrounded by other leaders all along this process.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon them in power and the Disciples go out into the streets, what do they begin to do? They begin to evangelize. In Acts 2 we see what happens when they go out into the streets in Jerusalem. Acts 2:14 says [14] *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words."* Basically what follows this is Peter's expositional sermon from Joel 2 which is an evangelistic application calling the people of Jerusalem to repent of their sins and to trust in the Christ whom they had just crucified in Jerusalem.

Like some preachers, Peter's sermon kind of droned on and on for he went a little bit too long. He never could land the plane so to speak therefore they broke in at one point and basically said 'Peter, could you get to the conclusion?' The end of an evangelistic sermon should end with the answer to the question 'what should we do to be saved?' and that is basically what the people were asking when they interrupted him. I want to show you what happens when they break into his sermon in Acts 2.

Acts 2:37–40 says [37] *Now when they heard this (Peter’s sermon) they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* [38] *And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* [39] *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* [40] *And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”*

What is being done here? They are doing the Great Commission. In the authority of Jesus they are proclaiming the Gospel. It was an evangelistic street preaching crusade and the people are asking what they must do to be saved. They are to come to Jesus, repent and be baptized. Baptism doesn’t save you for it is Jesus who saves you but that is the next step in obedience when you come to Christ which is the sign and seal of your covenant relationship. Acts 2:41 says [41] *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.* Men and women alike and their households were baptized and added, enfolded into the church. So we see the Great Commission at work here. The Great Commission tells that as we receive the Holy Spirit, ‘I am with you always even to the end of the age.’

I love how Peter continued to speak to them with ‘many other words’ in Acts 2:40. So many things draw me to this text. As he tells them to ‘save themselves from this crooked generation’ he is telling them to leave their sins in this generation and come to Christ in regeneration. This passage in Acts 2 shows us public evangelism, large group evangelism with a personal commitment to evangelism and there is a harvest of 3,000 that is likely only counting the men. Then what happens?

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.*

After the people had been added to the body of Christ they equipped them by the Apostles teaching and then they fellowship with one another. Then they did the Lord’s Supper through the breaking of the bread and then they had multiple prayers that they kept offering. That is discipleship. They had all kinds of blessings. There is stewardship as they sold their possessions and gave. They cared for the poor. They loved one another. There was hospitality and then it says they were meeting daily from house to house – small group discipleship. Do you think that there was someone or ‘somebodies’ in Jerusalem that had a house big enough for 3,000 people? If they are meeting from house to house it is small group discipleship and that is how they are carrying this out. That is how the Lord is blessing them in this congregation, through small group discipleship.

Now let’s look at Acts 4:1a which says [1a] *And as they were speaking to the people...* They were still speaking to the people. Did you notice how the passage in Acts 2 ended? It said that day by day there were those being added. So there was not only this personal evangelism erupting in a public harvest meeting of evangelism on the streets but there were also people sharing the Gospel personally for every day individuals were being added to the church. That

means Peter, John and the other disciples keep going into the city speaking these things into the city. This is how Jerusalem got filled with the Gospel.

Jerusalem was filled with the Gospel through various types of evangelism. There was public evangelism, large street preaching crusades, personal evangelism seen in the fact that every day people were being added and all of this is going on buttressed with discipleship as *they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*. In the context of all that they were meeting house to house every single day but they also gathered in the temple for the large group worship as well. So those were the ways they were meeting. What happens next?

Acts 4:1–4 says [1] *And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, [2] greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. [3] And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. [4] But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.* Now we have another harvest.

Here is another public meeting where we see a harvest of 5,000 and again this is just counting the men. All of these have now been brought into the church. They are not only filling Jerusalem with the teaching but now they are filling up the church with the converts. There were 3,000 and every day after that people were being added. Now 5,000 more and that is just counting the men. So just in the space of days, not sure how many, there are now probably up to around 12,000 to 18,000 that are in this church in Jerusalem. So the filling of the body of Christ was done as the body of Christ filled up and they started with 120. That is what happened with personal evangelism and discipleship.

According to the Great Commission, where is the Gospel supposed to go after Jerusalem? It is supposed to go to Judea and Samaria and then to the world. It will go to the world because the church at Antioch will get together to pray about it and they will send out their two best men as missionaries – Barnabas and Saul (soon to become Paul). But the church at Jerusalem doesn't do that because they don't have a mission's conference. So how is the Gospel going to go from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria?

This is pure speculation on my part. Antioch later will have a mission's conference and we see that in Acts 13 because they will send out Paul and Barnabas, but since Jerusalem doesn't send out missionaries how does the Gospel go out of Jerusalem? So I think what happens is, a Divinely designed mission's conference which is done through persecution. They kill Stephen and buy into this persecution stuff in Acts 6 and 7 and after they persecute Stephen they will persecute more people. Then they start persecuting the church. Let's look at Acts 8.

Acts 8:1–5 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 went about preaching (proclaiming/evangelizing) the word. [5] Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

So this persecution hits in Jerusalem. Stephen is killed and this religious terrorist starts rising on the scene, his name is Saul. Everyone says 'this persecution is a great idea so let's kill them all' so when they brought the persecution to bear upon the believers at Jerusalem then many of the believers scattered. Where did they go? They went to where they were already

supposed to go – Judea and Samaria. They specifically go to two cities – Antioch and the city of Samaria. As they go they begin to preach the Gospel.

Who preached the Gospel? It was those who were scattered. Who was scattered? It said in the text that it was Christians, except the Apostles. So it wasn't just the Apostles who went out and shared the Gospel. It was the believers and when they scattered they began to do personal evangelism. Then they give us a case study of one who was scattered and his name was Philip. He is a deacon who is out there sharing the Gospel. God blessed him. So there is a great work of the Gospel in Antioch and in Samaria.

I have to include that religious terrorist because he is going to get converted and he will become an evangelist to win people to Christ and plant churches. Where will he be put on staff? He will become the associate pastor at Antioch where his persecution scattered the Christians who began to share the Gospel and the church was planted there. I just love what the Lord does here. By the way that Antioch church will see the good job that Barnabas and Paul are doing and ask them to leave. They are going to lay hands on them and send them out to the world to preach the Gospel.

Do you see what is happening here? There is personal evangelism and large evangelistic events but they are buttressed by the fact that everyone is personally engaged in evangelism. I grew up in a Christian Missionary Alliance Church where every Sunday night they had an evangelistic service, unfortunately we didn't do a lot of evangelism. The reason for that was because no one brought any unsaved people so the preacher was under the gun to get saved people back up to the altar every Sunday night. The reality is there were a lot of people we could have led to Christ but none of the people were personally evangelizing.

As we approach the Advent Season we are about to go into a lot of big events with our Christmas choral concert, our Walk-Thru Nativity, our children's program, our Christmas services, etc. But they will not be effective if we are not out there sharing Christ and bringing people to them, because we have already brought Christ to them. So that big event is just one more instrument in our tool box but what we are really engaged in, is a lifestyle of personally sharing the Gospel and filling the city with the Gospel. Then when people respond we just reach out and love them right in to small group discipleship where they will learn to evangelize, love, learn and worship. Then they will go out and do evangelism and discipleship.

So I have a little assignment for you. Do this between now and January. Go tell me how many generations of personal evangelism have to take place before we win the whole world to Jesus. I'll give you a hint. It's not as many as you may think. You'll figure it out. So let's share the Gospel. In fact, why don't you LEAD – Lifestyle Evangelism And Discipleship. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Hear our praise and thank You that we can give thanks to You. Bless Your people as they speak up in thanksgiving to Christ and bless us as we hear. We give You all the glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen.