

Acts 9:20-43

Church growth – NT style

(We can learn a lot about evangelism by observing the early church.)

Introduction:

1. In this text we have two stories. Each ends in the same way – the church is expanded.
2. Saul's power is seen in his bold disputation for the Gospel.
3. Peter's power is seen in his demonstration of power over the enemy.
4. These two stories encourage us to both show and tell the Gospel.
5. The first story also demonstrates the important role of those who support others who are taking fire for the Gospel.

Saul tells the Story.

The Gospel is declared and also defended.

“Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he {began} to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹ And all those hearing him continued to be **amazed**, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and {who} had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and **confounding** the Jews who lived at Damascus by **proving** (to put together) that this {Jesus} is the Christ.

Those who proclaim the Gospel need to be supported.

²³ And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵ but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through {an opening in} the wall, lowering him in a large basket. ²⁶ And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all **afraid** of him, not believing that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But **Barnabas** took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ And he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out **boldly** in the name of the Lord. ²⁹ And he was talking and **arguing** with the Hellenistic {Jews;} but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ But when the brethren learned {of it}, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

The church is edified.

31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, **it continued to increase.**

1. Note that not everyone was doing what Saul was doing. There are evangelists who publicly proclaim and defend the Gospel. But not everyone is going to have that role.
2. This is not to say that others were not in an active and supportive role. Those who are taking the heat need someone to protect and encourage them. Public preachers and teachers are vulnerable and will need others to support them.

<i>When to support the minister</i>	<i>When to confront the minister</i>
• When catching flack for the Gospel.	• When misrepresenting the Gospel in word or deed.
• When not understood by other believers.	• When stirring up dissention among believers.
• When in need of material support.	• When fleecing the sheep.

Note: The responsibility of the congregation with respect to leadership. (I Tim.5:17-25)

- **Provide generous material support** – vs.17-18
 - **Protect from character assassination** – vs.19 Do not entertain accusations unless by multiple witnesses.
 - **Punish harshly those who sin and refuse to repent** – vs.20 Do not exempt leaders from the public exposure required in Matt.18:15-20.
 - **Treat fairly** – vs.21 Do not give special exceptions to leaders.
 - **Ordain carefully** – vs.22 Do not encourage others to take an authoritative role too quickly.
3. Barnabas (man of encouragement) demonstrates an impressive record of support for others. Acts 4:36; 11:22-24; 11:30; 12:25; 13:1-2,50; 14:12; 15:2,12,22,25.
 4. If the Gospel is presented so as to confront the culture, it will bring resistance.
 5. Arguing and proving the claims of the Gospel has a place in evangelism.
 6. Rules of engagement in arguing for the Gospel.
 - a. **Assumptions - Isa.1:18** “come now, and let us reason (This Hebrew word is a courtroom term for arguing a person’s case.) together, Says the Lord, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” **Acts 17:2** “And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. Explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead.”

1. The Gospel can be rationally defended but it is not based on reason alone.
 2. There is a common ground for logical debate.
 3. The Gospel story is grounded in facts of history and public records that can be examined.
 4. The Gospel story is rational and logical.
 5. Logic and reason are not always sufficient in and of themselves to produce faith.
 6. The heart knows a logic that the mind does not.
- b. Guidelines - **I Pet.3:15** “but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;”
1. Spiritual discernment (maturity) is needed in knowing when and how to argue for the Gospel.
 2. Defending the Gospel (before those who inquire) is more often appropriate than debating for the Gospel (which is best left to those with special gifts and callings).
 3. Christians should be prepared to defend their faith with more than good behavior.
 4. Debate and argumentation are not to be about one’s personal ego needs (to “be right”).
 5. Debate must be respectful, honest, open, and willing to listen.
 6. Attacks of another’s personal character do not further the Gospel.
 7. Winning a debate may not further the cause of the Gospel.
7. This is one of the major divisions in the book of Acts. (See 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31)

Peter shows the Power.

Peter heals Aeneas.

³² Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all {those parts,} he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda (LIDha). ³³ And there he found a certain man named **Aeneas** (ihNEEus), who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed." And immediately he arose. ³⁵ And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, **and they turned to the Lord.**

Peter heals Dorcas

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated {in Greek} is called **Dorcas**); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. ³⁷ And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. ³⁸ And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, "Do not delay to come to us." ³⁹ And

Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him weeping, and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² And it became known all over Joppa, **and many believed in the Lord.** ⁴³ And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon."

1. Miracles were often used to initiate faith. Acts 2:43,47; 4:4; 5:12,14; 8:6; 9:33-35
2. Not everyone was healed or being healed.
3. If we were to look for a parallel to this display of power in our day we might note:
 - a. There are gifts of healing in the church. The Vineyard Ministry coined the term "Power Evangelism" as it emphasized miracles as a part of the evangelistic process.
 - b. There are many other ways in which the power of the living Christ can be seen and experienced – social reconciliation, emotional healing, self-sacrificing love, etc.
4. There are two errors that we can make in our witness to the Kingdom.
 - We can view the propositional part of the witness as definitive and final. We can assume that strong logical argumentation for the truth will compel people to agree and believe.
 - We can view the propositional part of the witness as dispensable and futile. We can assume that words, reason, logical evidence, debate, etc. are no longer constructive or effective in a postmodern world.
5. What we see in Jesus and the Apostles is a show and tell witness. What we see in an effective congregation is a show and tell witness. We can ask ourselves these questions:
 - **Do we offer a clear declaration of the Gospel?** Are we telling the story fully and accurately?
 - **Do we give a credible intellectual defense of the Gospel?** Are we prepared to answer the objections that are raised by our culture?
 - **Do we demonstrate the presence of the Living Christ and His Kingdom?** Are we lending authenticity to our message with our lives?
 - **Do we support those who proclaim the Gospel?** Are we sensitive to the needs of those who preach the Gospel?