

# **EVANGELISM: BRINGING CHRIST TO UNBELIEVERS**

## **ACTS 8:1-4 / ACTS 11:19-30**

**DEVON CHURCH IS A TRAINING AND LAUNCHING PLACE  
WHERE CHRISTIANS LEARN TO REACH THE LOST FOR CHRIST.**

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## EVANGELISM: BRINGING CHRIST TO UNBELIEVERS

### ACTS 8:1-4 / ACTS 11:19-30

I don't know how you feel about this year of going through the *Purpose Driven Life* series, but I have really enjoyed preaching through them during the Lenten and Advent seasons. I don't often preach topically so this has been a stretch for me. However, it has been a pleasant stretch.

Again, please bear with me one last time. These purposes are the result of the overflow of love. The overflow of love in the Godhead resulted in the creation of human being. As we feel God's love filling us and overflowing us, we return the love back to Him. This love is called *worship*. When God's love towards us and our worship start to mingle and overflow yet again, it starts to spill on to others. God gives us spiritual gifts, talents, and all sorts of resources to help us pour out our love on those around us. When we use our gifts, talents, and resources to pour out love on others, we call this *ministry*. As we learn to be more proficient in our ministry overflow, we call this growth *discipleship*.

Now back to this overflow onto others. When our overflow of love is poured out on other believers, we call that *fellowship*. Fellowship is where we meet the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of fellow believers.

When this overflow of love is poured out onto unbelievers, we call this *evangelism*. In other words, a simple way to define evangelism would be, "Bringing the love of Jesus to unbelievers." Or we could simply say, "Bringing Christ to unbelievers."

You know, I think as we become older, we somehow lose the excitement of the power of evangelism. We have all tried to evangelize our family and friends at one time or another and because we didn't see immediate results, we often became discouraged.

But kids get the meaning of the message. One day, two little girls were sitting on the front stoop when the one little girl who was a Christian started to tell her friend about Christ. She explained that if she believed in Jesus, confessed her sin, and asked Jesus into her heart, she could be a Christian as well.

Well the little girl was convinced. She bowed her head and prayed to receive Jesus. After she was done she asked her friend, "Will my mommy be in heaven too?"

The little first girl responded, "Yeah, if she believes in Jesus. But if you don't want her there, then don't tell her about Jesus."

You see, kids really do believe the power of evangelism. How about us? Do we believe in the power of the Gospel message?

We have said this before, but please indulge me yet one more time because I think people have the wrong idea what *church* is all about. Church is not this building. It is not this institution or even this legal organization. The church is the worldwide gathering together of God's people under the blood and authority of Jesus Christ. Devon Church is this local gathering of God's people. You are the church. I am the church. This local church is a place where we are to be trained to carry on the five purposes we have talked about over the last five weeks. We need to try and quit looking at Devon Church as a place where we can have our needs met, even though it can be that temporarily. We need to look at Devon Church as a place where we can be trained for, and provided opportunities for, ministry.

Here is the main idea of this morning's message -- **DEVON CHURCH IS A TRAINING AND LAUNCHING PLACE WHERE CHRISTIANS LEARN TO REACH THE LOST FOR CHRIST.** Now to be sure, we are also to remember that the church exists to worship, fellowship, disciple, and minister as well. We must always remember to remain balanced. However, we easily forget that we are called to reach the lost for Christ.

The Christmas season is a wonderful reminder that Jesus came to Earth with the specific mission of reaching a lost and hurting world with salvation and wholeness. The message of Christmas is that God so loves the world that He sent Jesus to save all those who choose to believe in Him. We have been entrusted with a beautiful, powerful, and liberating message. The message to each individual person is simple, "God loves you and wants to be in a personal, passionate, and intimate relationship with you. If you will just humbly come to Him, ask for forgiveness and ask Him into your life, you can have that relationship with God."

But I'm afraid that we have a lot of growing to do as individuals, and as a church, because we have not been diligent about spreading this wonderful message.

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## **I. GROW WHERE YOU'RE PLACED BY JESUS**

### **(ACTS 8:1-4 / ACTS 11:19-21)**

*We All Ended Up Here At Devon Church By God's Divine Providence.*

First we need to grow where we're placed by Jesus. The early church learned this the hard way as described in Acts 8:1-4 and Acts 11:19-21. For all of us here this morning we need to remember this. **WE ALL ENDED UP HERE AT DEVON CHURCH BY GOD'S DIVINE PROVIDENCE.** Each one of us has a unique story as to how we find ourselves here this morning. To be sure, there were a lot of freely made decisions along the way, yet somehow through God's providential leading, we are all gathered here together this morning.

#### **A. LEARNING TO BE WHERE YOU ARE (8:1-4)**

In chapter 8:1-4 we need to embrace God's providential leading by learning to be where we are. I know that sounds funny, but if you think about it, it almost seems as if we never fully embrace where we are in the moment. Even while in church, we are thinking about getting home to watch the football game, where we will go for lunch, or even what we are going to do at work tomorrow. We are always so busy thinking ahead that we seldom fully embrace the moment.

Let me give us some background information for this morning's text. Jesus commanded the apostles to go into all the Earth. The church was to be Christ's witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. Yet the church simply hung around Jerusalem. They were growing, and great things were happening, but they remained in Jerusalem.

But God allowed persecution to hit the church. The first Christian martyr was Stephen, a godly man. He preached a sermon that so angered some people, that they stoned him to death in public. Verse 1 mentions that Saul was present. This event stuck in Saul's mind. It never left him. In fact this Saul later becomes the great Apostle Paul who writes much of our New Testament. Look what it took to get the church moving. Christians were being arrested, harassed, jailed and killed. Now look at verse 4, "*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*" There are two things here. First of all, they were supposed to be moving out from Jerusalem, but they weren't. They had to be scattered by an outside force. The church freely hung around Jerusalem and people freely persecuted the church, yet God's divine plan was being brought about. The church was now moving out of Jerusalem, into Judea, into Samaria, and out towards the ends of the Earth. The lesson is that you and I, the church, need to learn to be where God sends us or places us.

Most of you know the story of how Luing and I came to Devon Church. Let me just sum up the story this way. I didn't really want to come here, and you really didn't want me. I was about your 26<sup>th</sup> choice after other pastors you had chosen were unable to come or for some other strange reason they never made it here. I wanted to go to New York. Nevertheless, God got us together and the marriage has worked for 14 years now.

But there is one more little twist to the story. Most of you know that I have wanted to go on the mission field for years. In fact, when I came here I said something stupid like, "I'll be here for about five years, and then I'm planning on going into missions." You can see that hasn't panned out as well. I really have a heart for missions, but certainly don't have the gift of evangelism.

One day, Tad took me to lunch with one of his friends who had been one of my heroes in seminary, Ray Bakke. Ray is a famous innovator in inner city missions and foreign missions. As we were having lunch, I was kind of whining about not being on the mission field yet. I'll never forget Ray's answer because even though it was gentle, it hit me right between the eyes. He said, "John, are you crazy? You don't have to keep trying to get to the ends of the Earth. God has brought the ends of the Earth to you at Devon Church." From that point on, I realized that I need to grow where Jesus has placed me. He has placed me here at Devon Church. I have a unique opportunity here to be a local pastor and in that role be a missionary not to one foreign country, but to almost every part of the world.

If we were to take a serious demographic study of our church, we would find that we have people from almost every part of the world represented. Did you ever stop to think about that? Each one of you represents a particular people group. You may be an African-American, an African, an islander, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Bangladeshi, Indian, European, Hispanic, Polish, or one of many other ethnicities represented here. Nevertheless, you belong to a unique ethnicity. Did you ever stop and think that if you are able to reach people of your particular ethnicity that none of us perhaps can. If you were to reach these people for Christ, since you are part of our church, Devon Church would be reaching people for Christ.

If you are an accountant, you can reach other accountants. If you are a laborer, you can reach other laborers. If you are a student or an athlete, you can reach other students or athletes. Just think about what an impact we could have if we were reaching all these people for Christ. Let's think further. Let's say they become Christians and go back to their countries of origin and bring back the Good News of Jesus Christ there. We will be reaching the ends of the Earth for Christ. Just think about how we would grow if we kept bringing people to Christ and bringing them here to Devon Church so they could go out and minister to others. That's exciting to me.

#### **B. LEARNING TO BE WHO YOU ARE (11:19-20)**

But as verses 19-20 of chapter 11 remind us, we must continually be learning to be who we are. These people who were being persecuted and scattered never forgot why they were being persecuted and scattered. They had given their lives to Jesus Christ. They were followers of Jesus. They were children of God. Look, we often become confused as to who we are. We think we are Italian, Chinese, Spanish, or identified by some other ethnicity. We think we are teachers or lawyers, or identified by some other profession. We think we are the children of our parents. So we get confused because we identify ourselves by roles or designations of society. However, we have only one identity. If we have given our lives to Jesus Christ in faith, then we are children of the Most High God. Now to be sure that carries with it a lot of other titles like ambassador, co-heir with Christ, co-rulers with Christ and many others. But as believers we are children of God.

Back to the text ... In verse 19 we see that at this stage, the church was composed mostly of Jews. So naturally as they were scattered, these Jews reached other Jews with the message of Jesus. These were the original Jews for Jesus.

But look at verse 20. They didn't get hung up in their earthly designations. They belonged to Jesus Christ. They reached beyond their own ethnic and social boundaries. They started to bring the message of Jesus to Gentiles as well. If we know for certain who we are and to Whom we belong, there should be no confusion as to our message. Whether we are at work, at school, at home or at play, we are children of God and we have been entrusted with His message of salvation to all we come in contact with.

#### **C. LEARNING TO BE WITH CHRIST (11:21)**

But as verse 21 points out, that requires learning to be with Christ. It says that *"The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."* Look, we all find ourselves at Devon Church through a combination of human events and God's providence. Some of you were born into this church. Some came here through marriage, friends, or family. Some came here as a result of abuse or running to safety. Some of you found us by accident. And I'm sure that some of you were dragged here kicking and screaming. However we got here, it is in God's divine plan. We need to learn to simply be where we are. We need to embrace this time we spend together as holy. We need to remember who we are. We are the church. We are God's people gathered together, called out of the world, set apart and empowered, so that we can go back into the world and influence it for Jesus Christ. Here is the thought that we have to ponder. **WE ALL ENDED UP HERE AT DEVON CHURCH BY GOD'S DIVINE PROVIDENCE.**

## II. GROW IN THE IMAGE OF JESUS (ACTS 11:22-26)

*God Has Made Devon Church A Unique Body Of Believers With A Unique Mission.*

You know there was a popular saying while I was in school. It was by Marshal McLuhon, "*The medium is the message.*" When people had bad news to deliver they always used to say, "Don't shoot the messenger. I'm only the messenger." But for Christians, the messenger must be true to and a reflection of the message. In Acts 11:22-26 we are commanded to grow in the image of Jesus. In other words, we must become more like Jesus every day. **GOD HAS MADE DEVON CHURCH A UNIQUE BODY OF BELIEVERS WITH A UNIQUE MISSION.** The mission we are talking about this morning is spreading the message that God loves the lost people in this world and wants to bring them back into a right relationship with Him through faith in Jesus.

### A. EVIDENCE OF GOD'S GRACE (22-24)

Please think about how powerful the evidence of God's grace is spelled out in verses 22-24. These were ancient times when travel and communication were not as immediate and available as they are now. The city of Antioch in this passage is located in what is now modern day Turkey. That is a long way from Jerusalem. Yet word of the growing church in Antioch reaches Jerusalem. So the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to investigate. We know from this passage, from other passages, and from Barnabas' very name that he was a good man. His name means Son of encouragement. He is the one responsible for bringing the converted Apostle Paul into acceptance in the church. He is the one who stayed by John Mark when Paul wanted to leave him behind. Barnabas went to Antioch and found that indeed people were being saved and lives were being changed. I've talked a lot about this when we studied through Proverbs so I'll just summarize it here. It's not all about just doing religious stuff. It's as much about how we do things. Are we gracious? Are we forgiving, loving, and merciful? Barnabas went to Antioch and found evidence of God's grace. Even though these people were being persecuted, driven from their homes, and experiencing a great financial loss, they demonstrated their love for God and love for one another.

It's easy to be kind and generous when things are going well, but God calls us to be generous when we are financially hurting. God calls us to be loving, gracious, and merciful, even when we are going through difficulties in our lives. You see, this great outpouring of love, generosity, and salvation is clearly the work and grace of God.

Here's a question we need to constantly ask ourselves. If someone were to follow me around all day long and observe everything I say and do, would they come to the same conclusion that Barnabas came to, that there is evidence of God's grace at work in our lives? I hope so. Because that is a sign that God is working in our lives.

### B. EVIDENCE OF THE CHURCH'S FAITHFULNESS (25-26)

But as verses 25-26 point out, there must also be evidence of the church's faithfulness as well. Saul, who now had been converted to Christianity was found by Barnabas and brought to Antioch to do some discipleship training. Saul was now known as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas spent much time teaching and preaching.

We are committed here at Devon Church to teaching and preaching God's word. We are also interested in training people to participate in ministry. We are all here, with no distinction between, clergy and laity, leadership or congregation. We are here as God's people gathered together to worship, to disciple, to fellowship, to minister, and to evangelize. Here is what I want us to think about. Each one of us has come together in Jesus Christ, at this particular location to form Devon Church. You and I are the church. Our unique mission is to be God's message of love to the world. Look at the last sentence in verse 26. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. This was not meant to be a compliment. It was a put-down by unbelievers. Christian means "little Christ." To the Romans and the rest of the world, Jesus died a horrible, dirty, dishonorable death. If people called you a Christian, they were calling you a dirty little freak.

But the early Christians took the name and wore it proudly. When they were tortured and killed for the cause of Jesus, they considered it an honor to be treated like their Lord. It's not enough to just tell people about the message of Jesus. We have to live it out before them. We are the message. But it is not enough to just live a good life before people; we must tell them about Jesus. Good evangelism includes telling people about Jesus and living out lives of love and purity. **GOD HAS MADE DEVON CHURCH A UNIQUE BODY OF BELIEVERS WITH A UNIQUE MISSION.**

Since we are created in the image of God, and since we are being formed in the image of Jesus, then we should adopt this philosophy of missions. God so loved the world He sent Jesus. Jesus loved us so much He took on human flesh then came to live and die among us. Jesus thrived and accomplished His mission where He was placed by God; on Earth, in Jerusalem, on a cross. We are to thrive where we find ourselves led and placed by God. Part of that thriving is growing as believers. As we submit to God's making and molding process, we become more like Jesus. We are filled with grace, love, and mercy. Our very presence forces people to ask, "Who is this Jesus Whose birth we celebrate on Christmas, Whose death we remember on Good Friday, and Whose resurrection we celebrate on Easter?"

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### **III. GROW IN THE MISSION OF JESUS (ACTS 11:27-30)** *We Have Been Given The Mission To Reach The Ends Of The Earth For Christ.*

We accomplish that as we grow in the mission of Jesus that He has passed on to us. Some of that mission is described in verses 27-30. **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE MISSION TO REACH THE ENDS OF THE EARTH FOR CHRIST.** We must remember that we are merely a group of believers gathered locally. However, the church is worldwide and spans thousands of years. We are connected to the universal body of Christ that includes all believers all around the world and for all generations. A friend of mine who has been a missionary in France since we graduated over 23 years ago is now at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton designing programs geared at reaching Muslims with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I have a friend who operates a ministry just down the street here on Devon Ave. aimed at winning Muslims for Christ. Through Ray Bakke and these two friends, I am coming to the understanding that at least for our church, the distinction between foreign missions and local missions is a false dichotomy. For us, local missions is foreign missions. We have the potential right here in this tiny church to affect the world for Christ. But first we must learn to think globally.

#### **A. UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL NEEDS (27-28)**

This church in Antioch gets its first lesson in understanding global needs in verses 27-28. After God blesses the church in Antioch and after Barnabas and Paul spent time discipling the Christians there, and after they keep growing in numbers and maturity, the headquarters in Jerusalem sends some of their high profile leaders. During their visit, one of the prophets receives a message from God, "a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world." Knowing the needs of believers and unbelievers worldwide is an important start to joining the worldwide mission of Jesus.

The missions committee has started to gather resources that will educate us as to the needs around the world. We hope to pass this kind of information on to you on a regular basis. Further, we continue to keep up regular correspondence with the missionaries we support.

#### **B. MINISTERING TO GLOBAL NEEDS (29-30)**

But knowing about global needs isn't enough. Verses 29-30 encourage us to put our faith into action by ministering to global needs. This newly formed church made up of new believers and displaced persons, took up a collection to send back to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. This church gave out of their poor financial status but their rich faith.

I don't have this totally formulated, but I am praying about it. I can see how God is leading me to be the pastor of this local church and be a missionary to the world at the same time. Our church is a unique church. I have several friends who work with many churches. They all say that our church is like nothing they have seen. We are multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-denominational. And the leadership reflects that diversity.

If you take some time to think about it, if we were to take a look at our own particular situations and see how many places we have the possibility of influencing, the vision is astounding. Let's just take me because I'm about the most boring and vanilla person in the congregation. I have many close relatives that live in northern and central Italy. One of my cousins is a big shot in the Vatican. If I were to lead one or two relatives to a vibrant relationship with Christ, there is no telling what might happen in Italy. I live in a city that was once all Italian that is now rapidly becoming Hispanic. I am learning Spanish, and hope someday to reach my neighbors with the Gospel and perhaps start neighborhood bible studies. Just think if they get saved and go back to Mexico with their newfound faith. I travel to Jamaica once every other year. I bring bibles to the

poor and pray with them. Just think if they become believers and reach other people with the gospel. I come in contact with several Chinese people who travel to China and Taiwan. If I can lead them to Christ, the gospel can penetrate Mainland China and Taiwan.

In my boring little life, I have the potential to affect a great deal of the world. I work out at a very multi-cultural gym and have opportunities to minister to people.

Just think about how we have touched the world here. Last year, Moody Bible Institute sponsored a program that sent shoes to Romania. One of our members, Daniella is from Romania. She and Miki spearheaded the project and collected boxes full of shoes and money to send to Romania through this project. We have sponsored young people to go on missions trips.

#### IV. EPILOGUE

Please take some time in your personal devotions to pray for the missions program at Devon Church. Also take some time to think about your story and where God has placed you at this time in your life. Let's gather together and tell our stories. Then let's ask God to use us and present us with opportunities to spread the Gospel. Let's watch God reach this neighborhood, this city, our workplace, our neighborhoods, our schools, the ends of the Earth through us with true message of Christmas. Jesus came to reconcile us with God. **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE MISSION TO REACH THE ENDS OF THE EARTH FOR CHRIST.** God has given us a unique opportunity to reach the ends of the earth with His message of love. Are we up for it? It's an exciting proposition. But we must first have a vision for who we are here. **DEVON CHURCH IS A TRAINING AND LAUNCHING PLACE WHERE CHRISTIANS LEARN TO REACH THE LOST FOR CHRIST.** I think we all know that we are responsible to reach our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates for Christ. We know we have a powerful and beautiful message, but for some reason, we never seem to quite live up to it. I'm reminded of a deacon who knew all the right religious language.

An old deacon was leading in prayer, using one of his stereotypical phrases, which was "Oh Lord, touch the unsaved with your mighty hand."

As he passionately prayed this phrase in particular, he stopped all of a sudden.

The pastor went over to him because he thought he had taken ill. The pastor said, "Are you alright? Are you sick?"

The deacon said, "No, but something seemed to say to me, "You are my hand."

You and I have been called to bring Christ to a lost and hurting world. We do not have to go to the ends of the Earth. God has brought the ends of the Earth to our front door.

The question now is what will we do with the opportunities God has given us to reach the world? Dr. Wang, Rev. Calvin Gordon, and Yoko have a passion to reach the lost. They head up our evangelism department. If you have a passion to reach the lost, talk to them and join them.