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PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

All of us have come across people who are into various hobbies, sports, or whatever so much that they talk about it every chance they get. They will spend their spare time traveling to events where related activities are taking place. If it is golf, you will find the person on the golf course every weekend. When he or she goes on vacation, they play golf. If they go to a sporting event, it is probably a golf tournament. If you want to make them happy, just ask them about their golf game. I know people that at the same way about football. Other people are into bee keeping, or raising a particular breed of horses. Whatever the activity, they really work at "doing their thing" and telling others what a great thing it is.

The Apostle Paul was this way about the Kingdom of God. He took every opportunity and even created some opportunities to tell people about the Kingdom of God. It did not matter if he were free or in prison, he told people about Jesus. It did not matter if the audience were Jew or Greek, he told people about Jesus. He did not just wait for someone to come to him, he actively went out looking for people to share the good news about what God had done for us in Jesus Christ. He did not hesitate to tell kings and governors about the love of God and His salvation. God offers salvation to everyone, but only those who receive God's salvation in Jesus Christ will be saved.

Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea for a couple of years and had appealed his case to Caesar to prevent being sent back to Jerusalem where the Jews had planned to kill him. Most of us are familiar with the journey to Rome, the bad weather, the ship wreck, the miracles on the island of Melita, and his eventually being taken to Rome. Even though he was under arrest and had a guard with him, he was allowed to rent a house and live in comparative comfort with freedom to have visitors. Paul took advantage of this situation to again proclaim the gospel. After being in Rome only three days, he invited the Jewish leader in Rome to come to his house. Paul told them about what had happened that led to his being arrested and how he had appealed to Caesar. He told them that it was because he believed in the "Hope of Israel" that he was in chains.

Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." Acts 28:21-22

The Jewish leader denied knowing anything about the incident and had not heard anything from Jerusalem about Paul. News traveled slowly in those days and there may have been no reason for the Jews in Jerusalem to tell others outside of the area. It had been more than two years since the incident in the temple that led to Paul's arrest and most people (except the leaders that wanted to kill Paul) may have forgotten about it. The group that came to visit Paul said that they wanted to hear more about Christianity (which they referred to as a sect). The Greek word for "sect" is "haireisis" from which the English word heresy is derived. Their opinion of Christianity was not very favorable. What they had heard about it was all negative.

There is a lot of negativism associated with Christianity today because there are people who take the name of Christian and do not have Christ. The charlatan preachers who are in it for the money and the shysters that have "arranged healings and miracles" give a bad name to the cause of Christ among those that do not know Him. The world is quick to criticize and to put all Christians in the category of the worst examples they can find.

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some

disbelieved. Acts 28:23-24

Paul succeeded in getting many of the Jews to come hear about the Kingdom of God. He spend all day with the group and he used the Old Testament scriptures from the law of Moses to the prophets to prove that Jesus was God's Messiah. There was probably questions and share of opinion by the Jews. The bottom line was that some believed and some did not believe.

If we share the gospel with various people the bottom line, even today, is that some will believe and other will not. Many time we use the fact that people will not believe as an excuse to not witness to others. What we tend to forget is that our responsibility is to share the good news and what others do with the facts is something they will have to answer for. Paul had encountered mixed responses before; however, this did not deter him from carrying out the Lord's command.

So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, "saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." Acts 28:25-27

The Jews that came to hear Paul debated the matter among themselves, some believing and some not believing. This rejection of the gospel by many of those that heard it was evident to Paul as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah say the Jews of his day as a rebellious and stubborn people. By constantly rejecting God leading and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, people do become hardened and even though they hear the gospel message on a regular basis, they don't really accept it. As a result, a lot of people are soul sick and spiritually dead.

"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Acts 28:28-29

God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is no less important just because the Jews rejected it. God so loved the world that He makes His salvation available to all people -- Jews and Gentiles. Paul wanted the Jews to know that the Kingdom of God was still a reality even though they rejected it. God's plan and purpose will come to pass whether we are a part of it or not. It is by His grace that He has included you and me in His kingdom.

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. Acts 28:30-31

Paul continued on in his rented house for two more years and he continued to do what was the most important thing in his life, that of sharing the gospel message with people that are lost. We are not imprisoned and have the greatest freedom of any people in the history of the world. We will use that freedom to do what is most important to us. The question is where does "proclaiming the gospel" fit into our list of priority of importance.