

Acts 13:14-43 “Introducing Religious People to Jesus”^{** 1}

Main Idea: We can learn a lot about how to do evangelism by looking at what Paul did in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:14-43. If we’re going to evangelize religious people effectively, we must take three steps.

- I. Go to where the people are (14-15).
 - A. Paul went to the synagogue.
 - B. God opened the door for evangelism.
- II. Tell them the truth about Jesus (16-37).
 - A. Israel’s history is a witness to the validity of Jesus (16-23).
 1. God chose the patriarchs (17a).
 2. God gave Israel land (17b-20a).
 3. God gave Israel leaders (20b-22).
 4. God gave Israel the Savior (23).
 - B. John the Baptist is a witness to the validity of Jesus (24-25).
 - C. The resurrection is a witness to the validity of Jesus (26-31).
 1. The people executed Jesus (26-29).
 2. God raised Jesus from the dead (30).
 3. Witnesses saw Him (31).
 - D. The Word of God is a witness to the validity of Jesus (32-37).
 1. God did what He promised He would do.
 2. God raised up Jesus.
- III. Lead them in responding (38-43).
 - A. Offer forgiveness (38-39).
 1. If we believe in Jesus, God justifies us.
 2. If we don’t believe, we remain in our sins.
 - B. Offer a warning (40-41).
 - C. Give them time to think (42).
 - D. Keep the focus on grace (43).

Make It Personal: This week let’s do this...

1. Prepare yourself for action.
2. Ask God to open doors.
3. When the opportunity comes, resolve to talk about Jesus.

In our current series in the book of Acts, we’re watching Paul and Barnabas take the message of Jesus to the nations. That’s our mission, to be witnesses for Jesus, to our neighbors, and to the ends of the earth. But what specifically are we to tell people? We find the answer in today’s passage. This is what witnessing sounds like, particularly how to share the good news of Jesus with religious people.

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:14-43

The following account comes from *The Bible League*:

“There is a story. I’m not sure it’s true. It took place somewhere in the Pacific on a tiny inhabited island where all the people fished—with a pole. Each person was responsible to catch his or her own fish with his or her own pole. If you didn’t fish, you didn’t eat. Hunger kept everyone fishing.

As the story goes, a missionary, passing through to some more established South Sea island, stopped by the ‘fishing by pole’ island and saw that some islanders did not always catch fish. The heart of the traveling missionary ached along with the islanders’ empty stomachs. He, trying to do as he could, gave the leader of the island a fishing net and was gone.

The net proved to be an efficient fish-catching tool—much improved over the pole. The leader single-handedly caught enough fish in one night to feed the whole village. But the islanders kept fishing with their poles. Soon, however, many who had not caught anything or had not gone fishing at all helped themselves to some net-

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series at WBC in 2002.

caught fish. Gradually, over time, the one minding the net became the sole fish provider for all the people of the island.

As the people got more dependent on the net and the netminder, the islanders started to become lazy. What was there to do but watch the netminder catch the fish?

As they got more dependent on the net and the net minder, the islanders started to become critical...of each other. Sometimes they did not get as big of a fish as their neighbor. Sometimes the fish was not fresh.

As they got more dependent on the net and the netminder, the islanders started to become critical...of themselves. There was little they could take pride in. The one-time fishermen had become fisherman watchers. The players had become spectators.

As they got more dependent on the net and the netminder, the islanders started to become critical...of the netminder.

Years went by. Bellies were full; hearts were empty. Then the net broke. It could not be fixed. The people looked to the netminder. But he could not fix the net. The islanders started to take their frustration out on the netminder. It was his job to provide fish for their families. He had let them down.

The netminder told the people to catch their own fish. But they couldn't. The islanders had forgotten how to fish with a pole.

No net. No poles. No fishing. No fish. No food."²

When the church first started, the people knew how to fish. Jesus told His disciples, "I will make you fishers of men." And He did. And they fished.

But in time, for a variety of reasons, churches forgot how to fish. For some, fishing became the task of the professionals. For others, personal fishing for men ("soul winning") was replaced by marketing and programs.

My friends, fishing is what we're all about. It's our mission. "You shall be my witnesses," Jesus told His followers before returning to heaven (Acts 1:8). Jesus left us here so we could tell the world about Him. It's our task to reach people one by one.

Yet the sad fact is this. Churches are filled with people who don't fish. Maybe they don't know how to fish, or they know how but are sidetracked by other activities.

We need to be fishing—*all* of us do. Are you presently evangelizing (which means "bring good news to") lost people? Have you caught any fish in the last year or even five years? Granted, salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9)—we can't "catch" unsaved people apart from the sovereign effectual working of the Holy Spirit. But neither will we "catch" anyone if we don't get our fishing poles out of the closet and go where the fish are.

This morning we're going to look at an example of someone who knew how to fish. Paul was a fisherman. That's why he and Barnabas left the comforts of their sending church in Antioch and set out on the first missionary journey. That's also why they left the beautiful climate of Cyprus and headed for the shores of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). It's also the reason they did what we're about to see in our study of Acts 13:14-43.

We can learn a lot about how to present Jesus to lost people by looking at what Paul did in the city of Pisidian Antioch. Evangelism involves taking three steps.

I. Go to where the people are (14-15).

Verse 14 sets the stage, "From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch." Perga was a coastal city in Asia Minor. Perga is where the missionary team landed after their ministry on the island of Cyprus. It's also where John Mark defected (13).

² *Twenty-one Day Connection*, by the Bible League, 1998.

There's no mention that Paul preached in Perga of Pamphylia. Some scholars feel that Paul contracted malaria in Perga that forced him to leave prematurely and head for the cooler climate in the highlands. He went to Pisidian Antioch (not to be confused with the Antioch at the beginning of chapter 13 which is in Syria).

You might wonder, "Is there any biblical reference to this illness?" There may well be. Not long after this Paul wrote a letter to the people of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—these were all towns in the Roman province of Galatia. We know it as the *letter to the Galatians*. Paul said this in Galatians 4:13-14, "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. ¹⁴ Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself."

Apparently, when Paul came to Galatia, he was a sick man. That would indicate that when he preached the sermon we're about to study he was ill.

How ill? The oldest tradition of Paul's thorn in the flesh says he suffered from excruciating headaches. Barclay elaborates, "The most likely explanation if that he was the victim of a virulent recurring malaria fever which haunted the low coastal strip of Asia Minor. A traveler says that the headache characteristic of this malaria was like a red-hot bar thrust through the forehead; another likens it to a dentist's drill boring through a man's temple. It is most likely that this malaria attacked Paul in low-lying Pamphylia and that he had to make for the plateau country to shake it off."³

So he headed for Pisidian Antioch, situated 100 miles north of Perga on a plateau 3,600 feet above sea level. To get there Paul and Barnabas had to cross the Taurus mountain range by (what Barclay calls) "one of the hardest roads in Asia Minor, a road which was also notorious for robbers and brigands."⁴

That background tells us a lot about Paul, doesn't it? Why did he risk hazards such as malaria, hard travel, and robbers? For one simple reason. He was determined to *go where the people are*.

And there were plenty of people in Pisidian Antioch. Being situated on a major trade route between Ephesus and Cilicia, its location was strategic as a potential beachhead for the advancement of the gospel.

So, what was the first move Paul and Barnabas made when they arrived in the city? Luke says two things happened...

A. Paul went to the synagogue. Verse 14 states, "On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down." Why did they go to the synagogue? For several reasons perhaps but let's not miss the obvious one.

There were people there! If you're going to do evangelism you need people. Paul knew he'd find people interested in studying the Scriptures in the synagogue, so he went there as he often did when he entered a new city. What happened next is wonderful...

B. God opened the door for evangelism. "After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, 'Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.'"

Talk about an open door invitation! Why would total strangers give Paul the floor? Quite likely, Paul's "ticket" to speak was his "Pharisee card." When devout Jews heard that a man trained in the school of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel was present, they were all ears.

Our God doesn't waste our backgrounds and experiences. He uses them. He used Paul's rabbinic training to open doors for doing synagogue evangelism. He's using Nate

³ Barclay, 102-3.

⁴ Barclay, p. 102.

Bell's experience with coffee to create opportunities for sharing Jesus through a coffee shop ministry in South Africa. For our brother Dave Beam, the platform is being a business coach. For Douglas and Scott and others, it's coaching soccer. For several of you, it's working with students in the local school systems. And on and on I could go.

I encourage you to see whatever God has given you as a potential tool for evangelism. Do you have a large family room? Use it for a neighborhood Bible study. Do you love to read? Why not get involved in tutoring and use the relationships to share Christ when possible? See the potential in what God has given you.

If we're going to do evangelism, we must start right here. We must go to where the lost people are. Then what? Step #2 isn't profound, but it is vital.

II. Tell them the truth about Jesus (16-37).

I actually entitled this message, "*Introducing Religious People to Jesus.*" If you think about it that's what Paul found in the synagogue—*religious* people. They weren't godless pagans. They weren't immoral. In fact, they were devoted to being different. That's why they went to the synagogue. They were religious. But they were also *lost*, and didn't even know it.

In flyover country USA it's not uncommon to talk with people who have some religion in their background. How do you evangelize *religious* people? The short answer is, do what Paul did. Tell them the truth *about Jesus*.

Religion can't save anybody. Only Jesus can do that. That's what a religious person needs to know.

But how do you say that? And what is it about Jesus that we must tell them? Let's learn from Paul. He begins in verse 16, "Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: 'Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!'" Notice that Paul knew his audience. If you're going to engage in evangelism that's vital. A cookie-cutter approach won't do.

Paul knew he was talking to two types of people—devout Jews, and Gentiles who feared the God of Israel. Both groups knew and revered the Hebrew Bible. So Paul used the Hebrew Bible in his message. He began with Israel's history and then showed them how it pointed to Jesus.

On another occasion when speaking to polytheists in Athens in Acts 17, Paul took a different approach. He started with the creation account, and then, as with the Jewish audience, he ended up telling them about Jesus. We haven't done true evangelism until we've told a person about Jesus!

So then, how *do* you introduce religious people to Jesus? Here's how Paul did it. His gospel presentation takes about 3 minutes and 6 seconds to read. In it he presents four witnesses that speak to the validity of Jesus.

A. Israel's history is a witness to the validity of Jesus (16-23). In quick fashion Paul hits the highlights of the Old Testament redemption story. He emphasizes God's initiative in four actions in Israel's past.

By the way, please realize that the biblical view of history differs from that held by this post-modern age. The Bible teaches that history is going some place. There's a purpose in world events because there's a Sovereign Lord giving direction. History is not merely random acts of chance. The theory of evolution leads to a fatalistic and pessimistic outlook. To the contrary, a biblical worldview offers hope. God is at work in our lives today just as He has been in history.

We need to share that with people, as Paul did. Here's activity #1 in Israel's history.

1. *God chose the patriarchs (17a).* "The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers." Israel's history starts with God. God chose. God chose one man, a pagan

polytheist named Abram, and entered into a covenant relationship with Him. Then God gave the patriarch a son of promise, Isaac. To Isaac He gave two sons, Jacob and Esau, of which God chose the younger. To the younger He gave twelve sons, and from these twelve sons God formed a nation. “God chose our fathers,” Paul began.

2. *God gave Israel land (17b-20a)*. “The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, ¹⁸ he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, ¹⁹ he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. ²⁰ All this took about 450 years.”

My aim isn't to go into detailed explanation of these events, but merely to state them, as Paul did. And then to build upon them, again, as Paul did.

We can learn something vital from Paul about how to teach people. At first glance Paul's message may sound rather elementary, like a Primary Sunday School lesson. Actually, he's following a valuable teaching principle.

Take people from where they are to where they need to be. That's our goal in evangelism. Put a foundation in place and then build on it. In a moment Paul is going to present some radical truth that will shake them to the core. But first he establishes common ground. He shows them that Christianity isn't anti-Judaism, for its actually rooted in Old Testament history.

Moving along the timeline of Israel's history, Paul comes to a third divine action.

3. *God gave Israel leaders (20b-22)*. “After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. ²¹ Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. ²² After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’”

So yes, God gave Israel leaders. Every person in the audience knew that, and agreed with that. God gave our forefathers judges, Samuel the prophet, and Saul the king. Then He put in place a man after His own heart, King David. Yes, that's true.

While Paul could have said much more about each person mentioned, he didn't. Instead, he quickly left history and leaped forward one thousand years to the present, taking his hearers from David to the promised descendant of David with divine action #4.

4. *God gave Israel the Savior (23)*. “From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.” Please notice how Paul used Israel's history to lead his audience to Jesus. He just told the story, and took them to Jesus.

Should we follow the same approach with people today? It depends. If they know biblical history like Paul's audience did, sure. But most unsaved people around us are, to put it frankly, biblically illiterate. Paul could say, “God chose our fathers,” and they knew who he was talking about. The average person today doesn't know much about Abraham, Saul, or David, if at all. He has very little biblical foundation. That's not a criticism, just a reality we must face if we're going to help people.

For instance, a few years ago on the cover of *U.S. News & World Report*, the headline read, “The New Reality of Evolution: Where We Came From, Where We're Going.” The word choice was revealing. It didn't talk about the *theory* of evolution, but the *reality* of it. This an assumed fact for many in society today. We're not here because God made us, but because of evolutionary process.

The feature article made statements like these. “‘The scientific narrative of the history of life is as exciting and imbued with mystery as any other telling of that story,’ says [Andy Knoll, a Harvard paleontologist]. The evidence against evolution amounts to

little more than ‘I can’t imagine it,’ [biologist Paul] Ewald adds. ‘That’s not evidence. That’s just giving up.’”⁵

Now suppose you are trying to share the gospel with a non-believer who just read that article, or one like it. Should you begin, as Paul did, with Abraham? If you do, you’ll probably end up with a yawn or a blank stare. The reality is, we’ve got some groundwork to lay that was already in place when Paul addressed the people in Pisidian Antioch. They already knew that God is Creator, that as Creator God deserves reverence and obedience, that life will never work without Him, and that the Scriptures are His self-revelation and our blueprint for life. They knew what many people today haven’t even heard.

So, when we tell the story, we must go back, way back to the beginning. We must start with God as Creator, then we must help people to see the biblical view of history, as did Paul.

That’s witness #1. Israel’s history testifies to the validity of Jesus. Here’s the second.

B. John the Baptist is a witness to the validity of Jesus (24-25). “Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’”

Do you know who John the Baptist was? Apparently, Paul’s hearers were well acquainted with his ministry. Acts 19:1-3 indicates that John had disciples in Asia Minor at this time (which is where Paul was preaching). That being the case, they likely knew what John said about Jesus, that he identified Jesus as the Messiah.

What they just couldn’t understand was why Jesus ended up getting killed if He truly was God’s chosen ruler. Why didn’t the religious leaders believe in Him? Messiahs aren’t supposed to die, are they? What good is a dead Messiah?

Not much. But what if He is no longer dead? It’s with that thought in mind that Paul brings witness #3 to the stand.

C. The resurrection is a witness to the validity of Jesus (26-31). What did happen to Jesus? Paul addresses the issue head-on by focusing on three historical events.

1. *The people executed Jesus (26-29).* “Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. ²⁷ The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. ²⁸ Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. ²⁹ When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.”

Do you want to know why the religious leaders rejected Jesus? They didn’t recognize Him, says Paul. And they didn’t recognize Him because their hearts were hard, so hard in fact that they were willing to condemn an innocent man.

Did their actions catch God off guard? No, says Paul. What they did actually fulfilled the promises the prophets made centuries earlier. “You read those predictions every week in the synagogue,” Paul said to make his point. Indeed, the people executed Jesus according to God’s sovereign plan. But His death wasn’t the end.

2. *God raised Jesus from the dead (30).* In fact, notice how many times Paul mentions Jesus’ resurrection in the next part of his message. Verse 30—“*But God raised him from the dead.*” Verse 33—“*By raising up Jesus.*” Verse 34—“*God raised him from the dead.*” Verse 37—“*But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.*”

⁵ Thomas Hayden, *U.S. News & World Report* July 29, 2002, 42-50.

Jesus' resurrection makes all the difference. Without it there is no Christianity. Without it, we've shared only a partial gospel.

"But the resurrection is just a fable," says the critic. Not so, says Paul. The proof?

3. *Witnesses saw Him (31)*. "And for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people." The resurrection is no fairy tale. Witnesses saw the risen Savior, *many* witnesses in fact. The number exceeded five hundred, Paul would later specify (1 Cor 15:6).

Do you want to grow in your ability to present Jesus to lost people? I do. So let's learn from Paul. What did he do? He simply presented people with the facts. There's no hype, no tear-jerking story telling, just the clear, simple presentation of the facts with the absolute conviction that these facts were true. He put before them witnesses: first, Israel's history; second, John the Baptist; third, the resurrection of Jesus. Then a fourth.

D. The Word of God is a witness to the validity of Jesus (32-37). In verses 32-37 we see Paul showing his Jewish audience that their Jewish Bible, what we call the "Old Testament Scriptures", predicted Jesus. Specifically, he cites three Old Testament texts that anticipate the resurrection.

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³ he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father [from Psalm 2:7].' ³⁴ The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David [from Isaiah 55:3].' ³⁵ So it is stated elsewhere: 'You will not let your Holy One see decay [from Psalm 16:10].' ³⁶ "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. ³⁷ But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay."

Paul's point? It happened just as predicted centuries before the fact in the Scriptures.

1. *God did what He promised He would do.* Namely...
2. *God raised up Jesus.*

I'd like to make an observation. Paul used the Scriptures to do evangelism. That point may seem too obvious to be stated. Yet in contemporary evangelism, the American church frequently tries everything but the "obvious."

"If we're going to reach lost people, we need to use movie clips and music and have a Christian celebrity share a dramatic testimony. Then people will listen and be saved."

Answer this. Are the Scriptures sufficient to change lives today? Paul had a great story to tell—he was stricken blind by Jesus on the road to Damascus—but he didn't even mention that experience in Pisidian Antioch. Rather he used the Scriptures to tell people about Jesus. We must do no less.

We're learning from Paul how to introduce people to Jesus today, particularly religious people. Paul engaged in three steps. First, go to where the people are. Next, tell them the truth about Jesus. Finally...

III. Step #3: Lead them in responding (38-43)

Go. Tell. Lead. We mustn't give people the truth and leave them hanging. "What must I *do* to be saved?" the convicted audience asked Peter in Acts 2:37. And he told them. So, too, Paul led his hearers in responding. Based on Paul's example I believe we must do four things with people *after* we've shared the gospel.

A. Offer forgiveness (38-39). "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹ Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

Those words must have shocked Paul's Jewish listeners. For fifteen centuries the Jews had been offering animal sacrifices to cover their sins. The covering for sin was temporary and had to be repeated year after year. They could hardly believe their ears when Paul said, "Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you."

No more trips to the altar with a lamb. *The Lamb has been slain!*

But how do we experience God's forgiveness? Paul laid the options on the table.

1. *If we believe in Jesus, God justifies us.* There's a key word, one that Paul will explain in great detail in his letters to the Romans and Galatians. *Justified*. It means "to be declared righteous or right with God." Forgiveness isn't earned. God gives it to those who believe in Jesus Christ. He declares them to be right with Him on the basis of what Christ did. On the other hand...

2. *If we don't believe, we remain in our sins.* At the end of verse 39 Paul says we can't be justified by the law of Moses. As an ex-Pharisee he knew that firsthand. He worked and worked and worked to keep the law of God, but he couldn't get rid of his sins. No one can. He could not make his black heart clean.

It's no different for us. If we believe in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice, God justifies us. But if we refuse to believe in Him, if we try to reach God on the basis of our merit, we remain in our sins. There is no other option.

My friend, forgiveness is available! Isn't that awesome? As we talk with people, we get to extend God's offer of forgiveness to them. We can say as did the hymn-writer:

*Come, ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power.*

*Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome, God's free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance, every grace that brings you nigh.*

*Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of Him.*

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden, lost and ruined by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better, you will never come at all.*

In leading people to respond to the gospel, we must offer forgiveness. In addition, however, as did the hymn-writer in the final stanza, we must...

B. Offer a warning (40-41). Listen to Paul's warning, "Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ⁴¹" "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you."

Paul finished his message with a quotation from Habakkuk 1:5. In Habakkuk's day God said He was going to do something so remarkable that nobody wanted to believe it, even Habakkuk. He was going to raise up the Babylonians to judge the Jews. Now, Paul says, God promises to do something even more remarkable. He will forgive any person, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Jesus.

The people in Habakkuk's day wouldn't believe God, and they paid for it. That's Paul's warning. "Beware!" is the word the ESV and KJV use. Don't make the same foolish decision to disbelieve God's promise. His offer of forgiveness won't stand forever.

How did Paul conclude his message? Did he give an invitation? Not the kind we might hear today. There was no emotional story. He didn't ask for a show of hands or

invite them to walk an aisle. Instead, he proclaimed the truth about God's offer of forgiveness, then offered a warning about the seriousness of refusing God's offer.

Then he stopped. Why? Because by *not* talking, he accomplished something vital.

C. Give them time to think (42). "As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath."

We often try to do too much too quickly with people. Paul wasn't rushed. He did not try to force people to make a rash decision. He communicated the Word, gave a strong warning, and then gave the people time to think and the Holy Spirit time to open eyes.

D. Keep the focus on grace (43). "When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged [KJV says "persuaded"] them to continue in the grace of God."

Now we see clear evidence that the Spirit was at work. There was interest. The people wanted to hear more of God's Word. How do you help people, especially religious people, who express initial interest? Keep the focus on *grace*.

For a lost sinner, especially a religious one, the works-mindset dies hard. We want to think we can contribute something to our standing with God. But it's all of grace, says the evangelist. By grace are you saved (Eph 2:8). By grace do you will grow (2 Pet 3:18). By grace you will serve (1 Pet 4:10). It's all grace, and we must teach people that from the very start.

We've learned how to "fish" today. If we're going to fulfill our mission, we must go to where the people are, tell them the truth about Jesus, and then lead them in responding.

Make It Personal: This week let's do this...three practical resolves.

1. *Prepare yourself for action.* Suppose someone said to you as they did to Paul, "If you have a message for us, please speak." Do you know the gospel well enough to give a clear presentation? Paul probably spoke without notes. If we're serious about doing evangelism we need to prepare ourselves. We need to study God's Word, learn how to present the gospel, and memorize verses so we're ready when the time comes.

Ask a friend to help you. Practice sharing the gospel with a fellow believer. Practice, practice, practice. Prepare yourself for action.

2. *Ask God to open doors.* He is the Lord of the harvest. Pray daily, "Father, would You give me an opportunity to talk to a lost person today about Your Son, Jesus?"

Let's pray the same for each other. Paul asked believers for prayer in Colossians 4:3, "And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains." Get a prayer partner and begin to pray for opportunities to share Christ with the lost.

3. *When the opportunity comes, resolve to talk about Jesus.* It's great to invite people to church, to encourage them with biblical principles about family relationships, and so on. But we haven't done evangelism until we've *told them about Jesus*. So when God gives you the opportunity, talk about Jesus. Jesus Himself said, "No one comes to the Father *but by Me* (John 14:6)."

Closing Hymn: *Only Trust Him* (#330) all three verses