

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” – Psalm 119:105

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Evangelism Moves from Acts 8 to Acts 17

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Many of us are familiar with the wonderful conversion story of the Ethiopian eunuch as found in **Acts 8**. Philip is put in the path of the Ethiopian by God, hears him reading the Bible (**v. 28**), joins the man, and proceeds to build on the Ethiopian’s already present knowledge and faith which moves him to be baptized (**v. 39**). It is not only a great story, it has become in many ways a model for our evangelism efforts today. Around us we find people who are religious, or semi-religious, and who have some Bible knowledge. We see our task as building on what they know, and correcting wrong ideas, so as to bring them to conversion.

That is a certainly a valid model, and without doubt many folks have done just this. Many more have tried, only to find the “prospect” unwilling to learn more or give up deeply held false doctrines. However, I want to suggest in this brief article that following the example of Philip in **Acts 8** may not be the only way we need to do evangelism. It is time for us to consider the **Acts 17** pattern of evangelism.

In **Acts 17** Paul travels to the city of Athens. Here he finds tons of idols but no one who seems to know anything of God or the Scriptures. Paul is invited to preach to a group of philosophers, and his sermon (**verses 22-31**) is a masterpiece. Paul quotes from pagan poets (**v. 28**) and compliments the people for their religious zeal (**v. 22**), all while introducing them to the one true God (**vv. 24-25**). Interestingly, the sermon contains not a single quote from Scripture – probably because no one in the audience believed in the Scriptures, and so such would not have been meaningful. Instead, Paul takes a group of people who have very little real knowledge of God and builds carefully and constructively to help them better understand (and obey) the Lord.

It is my conviction that more and more we will find ourselves in **Acts 17** instead of **Acts 8**. By that I mean that more and more we will have to deal with people with very little knowledge of the Bible. Instead of trying to build on some faith and some understanding of the Scripture as Philip did in **Acts 8**, we will have to be ready to help people who know virtually nothing about God, the Bible, or Christianity.

I realized this when my daughter Rebecca recently went to lunch with a co-worker who had asked her some about the Bible. Rebecca had brought her Bible to work, this co-worker saw it, and began to ask endless questions

about it. Finally, Rebecca invited her to lunch where they could visit about the Scriptures without the distractions of work. What amazed Rebecca was how eager she was to get some information about the Scriptures, and how thankful she was that Rebecca would take the time to talk with her. We hope and pray more good things can come from this first lunch and conversation, but as Rebecca told about her experience several things became clear:

- We cannot count on people to trust the Bible or have faith in it as God's Word. When you don't know anything about the Bible why would you necessarily accept it as being from heaven and authoritative in your life? We need to be ready with proofs of the Scripture's authenticity.
- We cannot count on people to know all those favorite Bible stories that we learned as children. "Sunday school" attendance has been down for decades. Lots of people don't attend church at all (around 60% of the population) and people who don't go to church generally don't bring their children for Bible class, do they? So many people are growing up without any knowledge of the Bible. They don't even know who David and Goliath are, or who the apostle Paul is. All Rebecca's friend knew about was Moses and the Ten Commandments. Beyond that, she had no clue.
- Just having a Bible somewhere visible can be a powerful drawing card. Everyone knows the Bible is a special book and that it says a lot of great things. But lots of people don't really know what it says. It is kind of mysterious. They wish they knew more and they may have some interest in it. But where can they go to find out more? A friend with a Bible on his/her desk at work, in the car or in some other visible place says "Ask me about the Bible." What a great invitation that is!
- We need to be ready for "weird" and "off the wall" questions. Rebecca's friend started with the book of **Revelation!** Fortunately, Rebecca had marked a few of the verses that say the book's events are to shortly come to pass (see **1:1, 3**). She showed her friend these verses and then pointed out how Revelation was written to encourage Christians being persecuted and that whatever it means talking of events 2000 years in the future wouldn't be very encouraging. That's a good answer, and it satisfied her, giving Rebecca opportunity to move on to other matters.
- Being able to explain the Bible's unified theme is a huge plus. Rebecca spent lunch talking about how the Bible is about God solving man's sin problem so we can live with Him someday. This made the Bible story understandable to her friend, and gave a framework for her to begin reading the Bible. Giving someone a sense of what the Bible is all about

News and Notes

Material for Wednesday night's class is available on the table and front pew.

Members:

- * A card from Sara Brown is posted in the back.
- * John Moore is still having problems with a pinched nerve.
- * Cotton Read continues to have breathing problems.
- * **Nancy Read's** swelling in her elbow is moving down to her wrist.
- * Joyce Werner had a bad reaction to some medicine. She is now getting shots to help clear up her infection. She hopes to be out today.

Friends and Family:

- * Burton Brown, **Bonnie's brother**, is at the point of death.
- * Renita Lanning, **Earl and Janet's daughter**, has gallstones and is having surgery tomorrow.
- * Allen and Cindi Malone's **granddaughter Madison** has the H1N1 virus, and their granddaughter McKenzie had her tonsils removed Thursday.
- * Michael Read, **Cotton and Nancy's son**, found out his cancer is in remission.

Absent: Jennifer Nicholson and kids (PM only), Troy Nicholson (Jackson).

New Reports: Alessandro Corazza (Rome), Gary Hunt (NY), Chad Lynn (WV). Arrigo Corazza plans to be in the states and visit with us in January.

is a tremendous gift that can only pay huge dividends down the road.

As I write this I realize preparation for **Acts 17** evangelism is so different from **Acts 8**! We are so used to debating once-saved-always-saved, or faith-only salvation that we come armed to the teeth on those subjects. But we may not be in as many of those conversations as we used to be as we increasingly encounter people who really don't know enough Bible to believe anything about it. Paul was ready in **Acts 17** to help the people in his audience understand God's will for their lives. Let us be us wise about our times and hopefully, we can be just as effective.

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*“Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me
Your statutes.” – Psalm 119:12*