

Introduction:

I once read that Christians and churches are like trees. There are only two kinds of trees: growing or dead. In like manner, there are only two kinds of Christians and churches: growing or dead. We are a growing church. But even so, we want to be even more purposeful about our growth. We want to pursue victory as individuals and as a congregation. As such, we've been examining the very first congregation: the Jerusalem church. They were extremely victorious. We noted the keys that made them victorious and have now been walking our way through them one at a time. Already, we've been reminded that the Jerusalem church was victorious because 1) they were continually devoted to God and 2) they were one heart and one soul.

In **Acts 4:20**, we see the third key to their victory. Peter and John were charged "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." But Peter responded, "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." Why was the Jerusalem church victorious? Because they couldn't help but point people to God. They couldn't help but spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even when threatened, they just couldn't stop. If we want to be victorious, we must grow to that level of discipleship. We must grow such that we cannot help but point others to God.

Discussion:

I. Who charges us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus?

- A. In **Acts 4:18**, the rulers, elders, scribes, and priests charged Peter and John "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." Yet, Peter responded that they couldn't help but do so. They turned the world upside down because they couldn't help but point others to Jesus.
- B. We don't have a religious council calling us before the tribunal demanding that we not point others to Jesus, but we seem to have equally powerful opponents making that charge. Too often, we surrender to them. Who charges us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus?
 1. *The politically correct*: The only sin in our culture is intolerance. The politically correct tell us that preaching in the name of Jesus is too intolerant. They charge us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.
 2. *The atheist elite*: Atheists and critics are becoming increasingly militant. They don't necessarily pull us aside and command us not to teach in Jesus's name, but they've done a great job making Christians believe they are foolish to preach in Jesus's name. We don't want to appear foolish, so we hang back hoping to figure out some foolproof way to preach the gospel so people won't think we're ignorant. In that way, they charge us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.
 3. *The post-modernists*: Post-modernists say to us, "Who are you to speak in the name of Jesus? My differing view of what Jesus intended is just as valid." They tell us that no one can really figure out what Jesus intended because we are all just products of our upbringing and our version of Jesus is no better than anyone else's.
 4. *The secularist*: The secularist just wants to be left alone. They don't care so much if we believe in Jesus or even talk among ourselves about Jesus. Just don't bring it up in the world. Don't make Jesus part of any discussion outside of church. Keep him there where He belongs. In our country, they even think they have a Constitutional mandate to make the claim because of their misunderstanding of the principle of the separation of church and state. So they charge us to speak and teach in the name of Jesus in our churches, but don't bring it outside of there.
 5. *The societally polite*: We've all been told there are two things you shouldn't talk about: politics and religion. It's not polite to question someone's religion or share your own with them. It causes too many problems. We should leave well enough alone.
 6. *The clock*: All too often, we think of pointing others to God as a special effort that is done on special occasions and so we let the clock tell us not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. We just have too much going on to "do evangelism." We want to. We plan to when life isn't so hectic. But we never actually get around to it.
 7. *The fear of failure*: Often we are the ones telling ourselves not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus. What if I do it wrong? What if I make a mistake? I don't know what I'm doing? Nobody on the outside is charging us not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus, we're telling ourselves that.

8. *The fear of rejection*: Similar to the last point, this isn't anyone on the outside (unless of course a friend of ours has said he/she will abandon us if we keep talking about Jesus). This is usually our own fear. We are so afraid that some friend (or even someone who wasn't a friend) will reject us that we charge ourselves not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus.
- C. I'm sure if we worked harder, we could come with other groups or concepts that charge us not to speak in the name of Jesus. But the Jewish leaders threatened Peter and John with more than rejection. Peter's response was, "We cannot help but speak of what we have seen and heard." They were victorious because they simply couldn't help but point people to Jesus. No matter who or what told them not to do so, they couldn't help doing it.

II. Why couldn't they help but point people to Jesus?

- A. Have you ever sat back and questioned why this was Peter's response? What prompted such intense desire to share Jesus with others, to point others to God?
- B. Let's consider some of the reasons Peter felt this way.
 1. *It was his mission and identity*: According to **Acts 1:8**, the mission of the apostles was to testify about Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth. This was more than an activity to engage in, it was his identity. It wasn't something he had to decide to go spend some time doing. It was simply who he was. Granted, we aren't apostles, yet, don't we see many other Christians with this same mindset in **Acts 8:4**? Asking Peter not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus is like asking Peyton Manning not to throw a football. The same should be true of us.
 2. *Faith*: Peter and John really believed the message about Jesus. As **John 6:68** demonstrates, they had come to believe that Jesus had the words of life. They believed it so much, they wanted others to hear about it.
 3. *To them it was good news*: Let me ask you this. If you had been healed of cancer and the method of your healing was proved to be effective 100% of the time for 100% of the people who did it, would you tell folks with cancer? Of course you would. Why? Because it is good news. The word translated "gospel" in our Bibles (cf. **Romans 1:16-17**) literally means "good news." The sad part is I'm becoming more and more convinced that for many Christians, the "gospel" doesn't feel like good news. And the way we often present it doesn't feel like good news. To many, the presentation of the gospel sounds something like this: "Look, if you join us and try really, really hard, giving up enough bad stuff and doing enough good stuff, getting every possible doctrine correct, becoming more like us, you might just measure up and in the end, you might get to be with God forever." Let's face it. That simply doesn't sound like good news. But that isn't the gospel. The gospel is more like this: "If you surrender to Jesus, He will set you free from the sins which enslave you, allowing you to be in the presence of God now and forever." Of course, it isn't going to be good news to everyone, because some don't want to be set free from sin, they want to continue sinning but still go to heaven. That, of course, doesn't work. But for those who see that their lives are ruined by sin, the gospel really is good news. And when we see it as the good news it is, we will have to tell others about it.
 4. *The two greatest commandments*: I can't help but think Peter's response is anchored in God's two greatest commandments. **Luke 10:27** explains those commandments: ¹Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and ²love your neighbor as yourself. Why would it be wrong in the sight of God to obey the Council over God? Because it lacked love for God and the Council. Peter loved God and he loved his neighbor, how could he do anything but try to bring them together? Refraining from pointing people to God demonstrates a weakness in our love either for God or for our neighbor or both.
 5. *Peter had tried hiding the gospel before, and it didn't work*: When it comes to Peter himself, he knew what it was like to deny Jesus Christ. In **John 18:15-18, 25-27**, he was questioned at the trial of Jesus and he denied what he had seen and heard. The guilt was overwhelming. Then in **John 21:15-19**, Jesus forgave him and recommissioned him. The joy at that opportunity was overwhelming to him. He wasn't going to make that mistake again. Many of us are weighed down with guilt and shame because of our lack of speaking and teaching Jesus's name. In fact, it is those failures in the past that often keep us from moving forward. But, Jesus does forgive and does recommission.

III. What can you do to point others to God?

- A. Before we wrap this up, let's think of some things you can do this week to point others to God. And please, let's not cop out by claiming we point others to God with our example. The fact is living a moral, honest, industrious life doesn't look that much different from even many benevolent atheists. Most people in our culture have been so impacted by Christianity (even though they don't realize that is where the impact has

come from) that they all know we should work hard, be honest, and love our neighbors. Certainly, we must not allow our example to point away from God, but we must quit believing that merely our example points others to God.

B. Point others to God:

1. Invite them to our Sunday assembly.
2. Offer to pray with them.
3. Share your own story with someone about how God has helped you be set free from sin by the blood and grace of Jesus Christ.
4. Ask someone if they ever read the Bible. If they say they do, say, "Great! I love to read the Bible. I'm looking for people to read the Bible with. Would you be willing to read the Bible with me?" If they say they don't, ask, "Have you ever wondered what all this 'Jesus stuff' is really about? You know the best way to find out is to actually read the Bible. Could I get together with you some time and just read the Bible together?" (BTW: note my use of "read" instead of "study." "Study" is a word we use. It means something to us, but means something different to our non-religious friends. To them, "study" means some intense and hard, something they think they don't really know how to do. They are left at your mercy. "Read," on the other hand, is easy. Most folks can do that.)
5. At a restaurant, after the waiter or waitress drops off your food, let them know you are about to pray and ask if you can pray for them. If you can get a personal conversation going out of that, great. If not, leave a card about the congregation on the table.
6. Ask someone if they have spiritual beliefs. Find out what they are. Listen. If their beliefs don't measure up to God's Word, ask them this tough question, "If you were wrong about that would you want to know?"
7. Greet and welcome our guests in this assembly. If you aren't sure who all the members are versus the guests, then make sure you greet people you don't know. If you find out they are a member, simply say, "That's great. Isn't it wonderful that God has given us so much success in spreading the gospel that it took us this long to meet each other?" And if someone greets you like a guest and you've been a member for a while, don't get your feelings hurt. Just say, "Man it is so great that I've finally gotten to meet you and find out there is another person fighting the fight with me." Remember the 10-minute rule.
8. Set up a home Bible study and invite neighbors, co-workers, family, and friends.

Conclusion:

Jerusalem was victorious because they simply couldn't help but point others to God. Even the threats of the Jews wouldn't stop them. They just had to get the message out. We've got the message. We know the Savior. May we not be able to help but point others to God.