

(The Book of Acts) Session 10

by George Verwer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of exhortation, incarnational ministry, and supporting missionaries in spreading the gospel and establishing the early church.

Scripture: Acts 2:12, Acts 4:12, Acts 5:41, Acts 13:14-15, Acts 13:22, Acts 13:44, Acts 13:49

Topics: "Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of spreading the vision of the word of God and becoming mission mobilizers. He encourages the audience to take free cassettes to share the message with others. The sermon focuses on the Macedonian call and how the word of God was preached in Europe despite opposition. The speaker also highlights the need for boldness and the power of the Holy Spirit in spreading the kingdom of God. Additionally, he reads a passage from Corinthians that describes the hardships faced by the apostle Paul in his mission.

Transcript

Well, we didn't really finish chapter 13 because we mainly dwelt on the first seven or eight verses. There then came that great opposition from Satan and all kinds of different incidents. I think it would be good to read at least in chapter 13 a couple of verses before we move on, picking up at verse 14.

But when they departed from Pyrrha, they came to Antioch and Pisidia and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, You men and brethren, if you have any words of exhortation for the people, speak out. Say, uh-huh.

Get magic? Go into the Jewish synagogue, and after they have their little ritual, they say, Well, you got a word for us? But it does remind us of the tremendous boldness that these people had. There was again tremendous opposition getting around verse 44, the Jews opposing Paul. And chapter 13 finishes again with these great words.

Well, it's good to look at verse 49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. And that's been the passion of John DeVries and myself, that the word of the Lord could be published throughout the whole world.

What a powerful verse. And then it finishes with verse 52. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

And then we move into chapter 14, where we have the work in Iconium and then Paul being stoned at Lystra. I wanted to take a moment to read a description of the life of Paul. I mentioned I would do this in the beginning of the week from the book of Corinthians.

First Corinthians, chapter 4. Just listen to these words. Verse 9. For I think that God has set us, the apostles, last, as it were, appointed to death. For we were made a spectacle unto the world and to the angels and to men.

We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ. We are weak, but ye are strong. Ye are honorable, but we are despised, even unto this present hour.

We both hunger and thirst and are naked and buffeted. We have no certain dwelling place. We labor, working with our own hands.

Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure it. Being defamed, we entreat.

We are as the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you. A touch of humor there.

But as my beloved sons, I warn you, for though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. And I don't think you can understand what Paul is saying in some of these heavy passages, quite defensive passages, unless you understand the father-son, the father-children relationship.

This man was deeply involved with these people. And he perhaps didn't want to, but had to defend the gospel and defend himself. As the moment he left Corinth, they began to criticize him and attack him.

And I know I've had that situation. The moment I've left a place, where maybe even 80% of the people were blessed and helped and encouraged, someone, for some reason, begins to backbite and gossip or spread even rumors. This is why, of course, the challenge of the word of God is that we, men and women in ministry, our lives are without guile, to use old language.

And there's nothing more important than our walk with God. People ask me, as still the leader of Operation Mobilization, well, what's your main work? What's the main thing you do? I said, my main work, I've got to walk with God. Because if Satan can get me into something stupid, and that hits the press, everybody in OM and our prayer partners and our friends, people that have stood with me 43 years, they will feel the impact.

No one is living the Christian life in a vacuum. If you go down, if you commit suicide, you do something stupid, others will suffer with you. When one member of the body suffers, we all suffer.

And that's why the teaching about the body of Christ is so important. I write these things not to shame you, but as my beloved sons, I warn you. And then verse 16, Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

I had somebody once teach me that that was wrong. We must only follow Jesus. We must never follow people.

What's he saying here? Be ye followers of me. The fact is that men and women today need models. Our young people are desperate for models.

One of the reasons so many tens of thousands of young people will still listen to me all over the globe is because somehow the word is out that I have run this race since I was 16, and young people are looking, yes, not just for younger models, they need that, but they also want older models. And they're not generally getting it from Hollywood, though there are a few exceptions. And you probably are more of a model than you realize.

Now with that challenge about being a model has to be the challenge of the message of grace, so that they don't have unrealistic expectation, and you get into bondage, unwilling to face any failure or ever confess any failure to anybody, especially your own kids or young people. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which are in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you, but I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know not the speech of them who are puffed up, but the power, for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. When are we going to get that message into our churches? The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. When are we going to get that into our Bible schools and into our institutions? It speaks of reality, it speaks of suffering.

Some people misuse the word power and always think that that's referring to signs and wonders. That may be part of it, but you can't say that if you read this in context. Because this whole chapter is about suffering.

So that power isn't always to get delivered. The power isn't always for some kind of miracle. It's the power to endure, to keep on keeping on, through the kind of suffering and reality that Paul was experiencing in his own ministry.

And it's interesting that precedes one of the toughest verses in the New Testament, where it speaks about the phenomenal immorality in the Corinthian church. It is reported commonly that there's fornication among you, such fornication that is not so much as named among the heathen, the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. How we can have so much scripture about this, and speak so little about it in the body of Christ, is beyond my comprehension.

Except it is just one more of many signs of the lukewarmness and the deception that is so prevalent in the day and age in which we live. So as we get into chapter 14, we're getting into the heart of Paul's ministry. Paul, who we saw last night, was sent out by the Antioch church after prayer and fasting and laying on of hands.

And we notice that Paul was not just involved in evangelism, but he was involved in church planting, and he wanted to see churches established properly. So we pick that up at verse 21. And when they had preached the gospel in that city, and had taught many, they returned.

I have so many people ask me, why do you keep going back to Maranatha? Especially when I've never accepted even once their particular invitation to go where they think I should go. And I say, you know, it's based on relationships. It's based on wanting to go back to where you have some people that you know

and you can build on that.

And I've so appreciated those, because my memory is not that great, who have come to me and said, look, I met you here two years ago, and I've been praying for your ministry ever since, because that means something. So he went back. Instead of just going to new territory, he could have been in Spain by then.

He went back. What was he doing? Verse 22, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. This word exhortation keeps popping up, and it's a neglected word in our society today.

There's a certain group of people in our society, and with good reason, I'm speaking of the church now, who very, very highly esteem Bible expositors. And those are the people that often get invited to Bible conferences to speak. People like myself do not get invited to Bible conferences to speak, though I can expound the word.

I do not believe that is my main gifting. I sit at the feet of Bible expositors. But if you go back in the history of the church, you will see that it was not just men and women who could expound the word, but there was also the ministry of exhortation.

George Whitefield, who brought a few hundred thousand to Jesus Christ, was at the same time as John Wesley. Whitefield was more on the Calvinistic side, Wesley more on the Arminian side. Both of them are my heroes.

I've read biographies of both of them. I'll take all the Wesleys and Whitefields I can possibly ever get on our ships or anywhere else in Operation Mobilization. And we think of the life of other Methodists like Francis Asbury, and then the Salvation Army with William Booth, somewhat coming out of Methodism and Anglicanism, a movement that wasn't always evangelical in the United States, very generally evangelical in other parts of the world.

Still winning hundreds of thousands to Jesus Christ, the Salvation Army. And the story of William Booth, the general next to God, is one of the greatest Christian books you could ever read. You know, I see Mellow next to William Booth.

So he went back confirming the souls, exhorting them to continue in the faith. Though I have preached to you from the book of Acts, and we have had Bible teaching from the book of Acts, we have perhaps focused more on exhortation than we have on exposition and exegesis. And that's why, if you want, you can get some of these other books from even your church library would have a commentary from the book of Acts.

And of course, I believe this is legitimate, and from my experience in many, many churches where I get phenomenal response, God's people are wanting to be exhorted. What does that mean? It means we're telling you with our love, with our passion, now we need to go and obey this. We need to put this into practice.

You know, why stand ye gazing? You remember that verse in chapter 2? Why ye stand gazing? We, many of us in America, we're spiritual gluttons. We've been to so many Bible conferences. We have so many Bible teachers.

Think of this lady's meeting, flying this outstanding woman in. I just got a hold of her tapes. I'm looking forward to listening to her.

But we need to realize, if this does not become reality in our spiritual bloodstream, it will sooner or later turn to poison. We have many spiritual gluttons in our churches who have fed on the Word of God, read the Word of God, memorized the Word of God, but you can't see it in their lives. And their own kids can't see it in their lives.

And we need the ministry that George Whitfield emphasized of exhortation. So Paul did not go back to these churches expounding the book of Isaiah, he may have quoted, he went back in much exhortation that they continue in the faith. And that we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.

And when they had ordained elders, that was another big responsibility. One of my challenging responsibilities involves the appointing of leadership in OM, 80 different nations around the world. I'm not always directly doing that, but I'm involved in a lot of that.

And that's always one of the toughest decisions we have. Because if you get the wrong person in the wrong place, I tell you, it's a nightmare. I don't know if any of you are on pulpit committees.

That's always a great challenge. How many of you have ever been on a pulpit selection committee? I tell you. Try to find the right pastor for your little group of special sheep.

May the Lord give you much grace. When they had ordained elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

And when they had preached the Word, there they were again, preaching the Word. You couldn't stop these people. When they had preached the Word, they went down to Atalia.

And what did they do? They returned to Antioch. This is why when one of your missionaries comes back on a furlough, he is for sure following a biblical pattern. And Paul returned to Antioch that had commended him in the first place.

Verse 26, from there they sailed to Antioch where they had been commended to the grace of God. That word grace keeps popping up. If you think it's strong in Acts, try Galatians.

I was privileged as a baby Christian to study under Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse. Photograph records, you know how old I am. You've seen them, they go around.

You put a little needle on them. I used to put a penny on my little thing because it wasn't working right, and I put a penny on top of the arm to hold it down. It's not good for the records.

But I listened to Donald Gray Barnhouse on the book of Galatians. That was my real entry into the message of grace. Praise God for such people.

So they went back to Antioch, and they shared what had been happening. When they had come, they had gathered the church together. You see, it's good to get to gather together.

They reviewed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode a long time with the disciples. Follow-up takes time.

And brothers and sisters, as you attempt to understand world missions, you must understand there is no substitute for incarnational ministry on the part of a committed missionary, whether he or she is an Indian or an American. We can have radio, we can have literature, we can have television, we can have drama, Jesus films, gospel drama, contemporary music, Christian clowns, you name it, it's out there. But none of it is a substitute for people living among the people and Christ being manifest in their lives.

I want to thank every one of you who supports missionaries. I want to thank every one of you who comes from churches that support missionaries. They're not all perfect.

Some of them may come back discouraged. They're human like all the rest of us. But as you look through the book of Acts, you'll see that God uses people.

And I could give you 100, I could give you 1000 stories of how God uses people, ordinary people, on the mission field. And if any of you someday would like to support a missionary out on the field, even in a small way, to the average missionary when they get \$25, that's a big thing. That's a big thing.

Most all missionaries are struggling financially. And I believe, with all my heart, we need to continue to support American missionaries while we engage in many other things as well. So Paul, a missionary, and Barnabas came back, and they shared and they reviewed what God had done, and then they stayed there for quite a while.

And we have discovered our church planters have to stay sometimes in the same place. A couple of years, we sent very young teens into Albania. We were praying for Albania so long.

It was the most anti-American, anti-Christian nation in the world, far beyond China. Albania was complete, utter fanatic. People tried many methods to get the gospel into Albania.

We even put the gospel in bottles and sent it down the rivers. They put nets in all the rivers and caught all the bottles. We went along the coast of Albania.

I got this idea of balloons off our ship along the coast of Albania, helium balloons with the Word of God. We launched all these balloons off our ship off the coast of Albania 10, 15, 20 years ago. We didn't have the wind thing right, and they blew over toward Italy and didn't get in Albania.

Ten years ago, in answer to prayer and prayer and fasting, God opened Albania. We sent teens in. They were weak.

They were young. And within a few years, they had planted living churches. And recently, when we were working among the refugees from Kosovo, we submitted ourselves to the churches we planted in order to work among the Kosovo refugees.

It's incredible what God has done in Albania. So the book of Acts lives on. Then we find, of course, the big council of Jerusalem meetings.

This really helped me as I used to hate to go to board meetings and council meetings and all these kinds of things that I have to go to. And from this passage, I realized and had to repent of bad attitude that such meetings were biblical. They had them in the New Testament.

They had things they had to argue about. In fact, in this particular case, Peter had to be rebuked. Let's just read that, beginning up at verse 6. The apostles and the elders came together to consider this matter, the

whole thing of legalism.

And when there had been much disputing, so don't get intimidated by that if you have it in your church. Much disputing. Peter rose up and said unto them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

And God, who knoweth the hearts, bore them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit even as he did with us. And then he had to gently rebuke them. Paul and Barnabas both then give their testimony.

And then James announces the decision of the council, starting there at verse 13. Then they had to write some letters to put a few people right. And referred again in an amazing way in verse 26, to these men that have hazarded their lives.

They risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of our missionaries are risking their lives. My own nephew living in Afghanistan is risking his life, especially after the Americans bombed Afghanistan just down the road from where he's living.

So what a tremendous obligation we have to intercede for these people and to pray for these people. As we get toward the end of that chapter, we see the launching of the second missionary journey. Verse 36, And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city.

Wow, that's a little idealistic. Where we have preached the word of God and see how they are. Barnabas determined to take with him John, whose surname was Mark.

Remember Mark left the team earlier. He didn't really work out very well. Paul thought it not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Philia, and went with them to the work.

And the contention was sharp between them, that they departed asunder, old King James English, one from another. So Barnabas took Mark and sailed into Cyprus. Paul then chose Silas, departed being commended by the brethren unto the grace of God, and he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Unrealistic ideas of how the New Testament church should function have caused more confusion than we can ever know. Remember my little verb or proverb, where two or three are gathered together, sooner or later there will be a mess. So if your church is in a bit of mess, that doesn't mean God isn't working.

And we need to learn how to handle our difficulties, and sometimes it's best to separate. I know churches where the division between two parties was so great, it was best to separate. That might be plan B, but we have a God who can make plan B even greater than plan A, because He's so wonderful and He's so sovereign.

Did I give you my plan B, plan C, D, E theology yet? Here I sometimes get a little mixed up. But I preach among a lot of people who have difficulties, even in prisons. They've failed, they've gone through two or three divorces, and wondering if God can ever use them.

They're on plan F. You know what I say to those people? Praise God for a big alphabet. Press on. Bounce back.

The grace of God is bigger than all of it. So Paul and Barnabas, this great team, they split, they went in separate directions, and yet the Holy Spirit continued the work. If you get into chapter 16, you get into another one of the most exciting chapters in the whole of the book of Acts, you get into the Macedonian vision.

Here they were, verse 6, going in one direction. What happens? The Holy Spirit forbids them to preach the Word of God in Asia. So they start in another direction.

After they had come to Mycenae, verse 7, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit allowed them not. I heard Greg Livingstone, Greg was with OM about 15 or 20 years, and then launched out to start Frontiers, which is one of the largest missions in the world among Muslims. 600 workers among Muslims.

The story of Greg Livingstone is absolutely phenomenal. Incredible background. Wheaton College graduate, then came with OM, helped us start to work in a number of countries.

In fact, the day Greg Livingstone left our ship, around 29 years ago, the ship was not his thing. He was to get involved with Muslims. I lost my Bible and it was replaced with this damaged Bible that I got cheap or somebody gave to me, I think from the Moody bookstore.

Funny how you remember those things. But study this Macedonian call on your own because it's so exciting. Verse 9, And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

There stood a man of Macedonia beseeching him, saying, Come over unto Macedonia and help us. And one of the reasons I prayed for some of these different nations over these past evenings is because from these nations like Tibet and Pakistan and Afghanistan and Iran and Iraq and Libya and Tunisia and Turkey and Central Asia, people in a sense are giving us a Macedonian call. Come over and help us.

Come over and help us. The first way we can help is by our prayers. Then we can help by spreading the vision to others and becoming mission mobilizers.

Please do pick up some of these cassettes. It's almost impossible to sell single cassettes that aren't attractive. So these are free.

Just take one. How anybody can refuse a free cassette is beyond me because you can put scotch tape over those holes and you can record over the message and use them for some other purpose. I'll take all your free cassettes that you can possibly give me.

And so this Macedonian call was given and they responded immediately. We endeavored, verse 10, to go into Macedonia, gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel unto them. And the Word of God goes into Europe.

And 2,000 years later, Europe is still a mission field. Paul enters into Philippi. Then Lydia comes to Jesus Christ.

Then again the counterattack where Paul and Silas are beaten. And we find phenomenal things happening. Look at verse 31.

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved in thy house. The phenomenal story of the Philippian jailer. Isn't that exciting? Paul is back in prison.

Verse 25, And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard it. I mean, this is dangerous. This is a prison.

They're going to get beaten up. Have you ever seen any of these prison movies? Shawshank Redemption. Oh, wow! This is not the thing to do in prison.

But there was suddenly an earthquake. God's great rescue program. They were delivered.

Meanwhile, the jailer gets saved. And we have that wonderful verse, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved in thy house. And then we have verse 33, He took them the same hour of the night, washed their stripes, was baptized.

He and all his immediate family, and when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them. There's that hospitality ministry. Rejoiced, believing in God with all of his house.

When you get into chapter 17, you find that powerful verse 6 referring to this little team, this little apostolic team. They're referred to as those who turned the world upside down. Slightly different from the average chosen, generally frozen saint in 1999.

We must learn from the book of Acts. We must learn from what God did in the early church. And find more of that in our own churches and our own lives for God's glory.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You for this powerful book. No, we've not been able to get through all of it.

Just have one final session tonight. We are trusting You to make some of this a reality in our own lives. That Lord, from this day on, we may be committed to book of Acts' biblical principles.

That we would know this grace, we would know this balance, but we would also know this boldness and this cutting edge evangelistic zeal to take the Gospel to the whole world. That we also might be willing to suffer for the sake of the Gospel and be delivered from this sort of quasi-Christianity that is so prevalent in our country. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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