

WHO WILL OPEN THE DOOR?

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A few Sundays ago I preached about prayer and said that prayer is a knocking on the door of Heaven. I pointed out that the church kept knocking on the door of Heaven while the Apostle Peter was in prison awaiting execution. I also pointed out that when Peter knocked on the door of Mary's house, Rhoda, the young maid, was so excited to hear Peter's voice that she did not open the door to Simon Peter. But there is another door that needs to be opened. That is the door of salvation. God opens that door, but we can help Him to do so.

The first missionaries went out into the world to preach the universal Gospel of Jesus Christ, and wherever they went they told those who heard their message that they, the listeners, needed to turn from their sinful, unbelieving, polytheistic lifestyles and accept the true God and Father and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In this first missionary journey they went to Cyprus, then to Pisidian Antioch, and now in Chapter 14 of the *Book of Acts* we find them witnessing in Iconium, in Lystra and Derbe, and finally in their return to Syrian Antioch, they preached in Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, and Attalia. They always followed the same pattern, preaching in the synagogue to Jews, Jewish proselytes, and 'god-fearers.' When not allowed to preach there, they preached to the Gentiles. In Pisidian Antioch they also appointed church leaders to serve when they were gone.

Now, in Syrian Antioch we find these words:

AC 14:24 After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia,²⁵ and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.

AC 14:26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.²⁷ On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.²⁸ And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE. THROUGH THEM. HOW HE HAD OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH. TO THE GENTILES.

Although they had performed the ceremony the Church at Antioch was well aware that God had called and commissioned these missionaries. As bold as Saul was, and as loyal as Barnabas was, they would not have dared to make such a dangerous journey on their own. They sailed out into the world of their day with the blessings of the church and of the God of all nations, and languages, and peoples.

They landed on the island of Cyprus, preached the gospel at Salamis and journeyed to Paphos where God performed a miracle and blinded Bar-jesus to show Sergius Paulus the ruler of his need to be saved. God opened the door and he believed. Sometimes God has to close the door on false prophets to open the door for others. Then they journeyed to Pisidian Antioch and preached at Perga in Pamphylia in the Jewish synagogue. There we find God opening a door to the hearers:

AC 13:42 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 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 them to continue in the grace of God.

AC 13:44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. They had been saved, not by Paul, not by Barnabas, but by God Himself. After the entire city had come to hear God's Word, the Devil stirred Paul's enemies to jealousy.

Listen:

AC 13:44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

AC 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

AC 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

AC 13:49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

God was at work, and they were filled with joy despite the persecution of the enemy. Then they preached in Iconium, and God was at work there opening the door of faith:

AC 14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the

Lord, who confirmed the message of His grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

At Iconium their enemies were ready to stone them, which, when they heard of it they fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia. Through the power of God at Lystra a crippled man was healed and the superstitious people thought Paul and Barnabas were ‘gods’ and tried to worship them, calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes. Listen to what Paul says to them:

AC 14:14 But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

In effect Paul is saying, “This healing is from the Eternal God, not from us. What you see is God at work.”

Then Paul was stoned at Lystra by Jews that came down from Antioch and Iconium. Left for dead the disciples of the Lord gathered round him and prayed and God raised him up. God’s power again displayed! The missionaries came back to Derbe with Paul and strengthened the disciples they had won to God, and appointed elders in every church after prayer and fasting.

God was at work; the missionaries were working with God in His work.

They came back to Antioch in Syria and reported to the home church “all that God had done THROUGH THEM!”

Did you hear that? God worked through them! Someone put it like this— “Without God, you cannot; without you, God will not.” Since the message of salvation includes mankind, and is spoken to mankind, and is for mankind, then man must be a part of the process.

A.T. Pierson once said that even though he may be a poor preacher, he could preach a better message than Gabriel, for Gabriel the angel could not know what it meant to be a sinner saved by grace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all mankind. The Bible clearly says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have Everlasting Life.”

That is the truth we are to tell to the world. That is the truth Paul and Barnabas told to the world. “God loves you whether you or Jew or Gentile; and God wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” If the Gospel is not universally valid for every one, it is not valid for you and me. But the truth is that it must be preached to all.

Paul said, ^{1CO 1:18} For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

The Power and the Wisdom to Open the Door of Salvation to mankind lies with God. But He gives us His strength, and so we preach. Moreover, as the great apostle said, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." You see, God has appointed us to be witnesses of the Gospel. Whether people respond to that Gospel is between them and God, but preach we must, teach we must, witness we must.

Vance Havner said, "We do not have a secret to be hidden, but a story to be heralded." Havner said again, "The gospel is not something we come to church to hear; it is something we go from church to tell." When Paul asked the question in Romans 10, 'how shall they hear without a preacher,' he was not referring to someone whose role is preaching; he was talking about witnessing the faith. You see, if we have been born again we are preachers of the faith.

Friday night I was in the IGA store to find a few items, and a young man ran up to me enthusiastically and grabbed my hand. At first I did not recognize him. Then I saw that it was a young person I had witnessed to in this community a number of years ago. By his smile and by his enthusiasm I knew that he was now a Christian, so I asked him about it. Sure enough he and his wife are members of a church in the county; and I believe that the witness of our church pointed him in the direction which he has recently taken. We helped open the door of salvation for him.

A man by the name of Joseph Aldrich had it right when he said, "God's evangelism strategy in a nutshell: He desires to build into you and me the beauty of His own character, and then put us on display."

Listen again to Luke's conclusion of the first missionary journey:

^{AC 14:27} On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

They had not done The Work, they had simply told the story and God had done The Work. But the Partnership with God is essential for the salvation of humanity. As the great Indian Christian D.T. Niles said many years ago, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread." Remember the woman at the well of

Samaria, who, when she found the Water of Life, ran out and brought others to the Fountain of Living Waters.

HOW HE HAD OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH. That has real significance. You see, before the Gospel men thought that righteousness came by the law. The Jews had the Decalogue and the Pentateuch. They believed that if they lived by the 10 commandments and kept the laws in the first five books of the Old Testament that they would be righteous in God's sight. But that was wrong! Since God is an Utterly Holy God, no one can be justified in God's sight by human righteousness. As the Old Testament says, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags."

In Galatians, Paul writes, ^{GAL 2:15} We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

He writes again in Galatians: ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

Isn't it interesting that many churches still believe that 'good works' can qualify a man as 'righteous' in the sight of God. A perfect God demands perfection, and cannot demand less. Since no man can achieve that perfection, God allowed His perfect Son to be the propitiation for our imperfection. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He is our Righteousness. Faith in Jesus Christ brings the Grace of God into our Lives as the Holy Spirit sanctifies our being with His Presence in our hearts.

That great fact gave salvation to the Apostle Paul. That great fact gave Augustine to the Church, a former profligate by his own admission. That great fact gave us Luther, the Augustinian Monk, who flagellated himself with cords, and starved himself in his monastery cell to make himself right with God, and to no avail. Then, this teacher of Romans read that the just (justified) shall live by faith, and as a consequence, he liberated the church to be The Church once more.

The message of these men is our message too. ^{Eph. 2:8-9} For by grace are you saved, through faith; and that not of yourself: It is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.

GOD OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH TO THE GENTILES. God chose the Jews to be His special people. Now, God chooses the Gentiles to enter into a faith covenant with Him also. The Gentiles, the ethnos, simply means that God has chosen the whole world to be His elect in Christ provided they choose Him.

Paul would later write in Romans:

Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him.

Rom. 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

God has opened the door of faith to the entire world, to every nation, language, people group, ethnicity, to all flesh. The promise has been fulfilled: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh....” Praise God for that! Whatever the color of that flesh, however pretty or ugly that flesh, whatever language that flesh speaks, God has poured out of His Spirit upon that flesh.

And WHO WILL OPEN THE DOOR OF FAITH? Obviously it must be God, who has and still does open that door. But my friends, our greatest joy comes when we HELP HIM OPEN THAT DOOR.