

This is the 1st in a 3-sermon series: Good News for Everyone	Good News for Religious People - Antioch of Pisidia Acts 13.13-50 by Tim Isbell	Preached 4/13/2008
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Thesis: The Good News of Jesus Christ is good news even for people who are already very religious, though such people are not always receptive.

(The primary source for this sermon series is Contextualization in the New Testament by Dr. Dean Flemming. For more on sharing the Good News in modern cultures, please take a look at the Christian Teaching: [Ordinary Practice Evangelism](#).)

(Note: Sometimes I prepare a Worship Quiz for the older elementary through high school students to complete during the sermon. I often have some goofy or edible prize for anyone who participates (turns it in to me afterwards. Generally all the adults want one, too... so I give it to them. The payoff is that the congregation pays more attention, and I learn from their answers what they understood and where my sermon "missed them." [Here's the Worship Quiz I used for this sermon](#). Some of my quizzes have questions from other parts of the worship service other than the sermon; this one is confined to just the sermon.)

Contextualization

Some of the information in this section is from the introductory pages of *Contextualization of the New Testament*, ~p13).

While getting my BS in Electrical Engineering in Ohio I taught a junior high boys Sunday School class. Dean Flemming was one of the class members. Dean went on to graduate from seminary in the US, then did his PhD in New Testament at Edinburgh, Scotland. His first ministry assignment was as a professor in the Nazarene Asia-Pacific Seminary in the Philippines. We keep in touch down through the years, most recently in terms of me reviewing his upcoming books.

Dean proceeded to teach in the categories familiar to him from US and Europe: development of Christian thought in Western Civilization, historicity of Christ's resurrection, assurance of personal salvation, and such things. Soon he began listening to Asia-Pacific students, and Dean realized that he was answering questions they were not asking. What they were asking were things like:

What is the New Testament perspective on suffering? Oppression?

What resources does the Bible and Christian faith provide for encountering evil spiritual powers?

What is the relationship between the Bible and the writings of Asian religions?

Is it wrong to worship relatives?

These were the burning issues in Asia, quite unlike in the geographies he came from. So Dean went back to the Bible to help in his new Asian context.

Essentially what Dean needed to do was to contextualize the core of the Good News for the context of his new Asia-Pacific world. Today he's still at it teaching students in Euro-Asia and the Middle East, preaching and teaching around the world, and writing books with the theme of contextualization. This 3 sermon series evolved from my reviewing his Contextualization material.

Show stack of evangelism tracts (show a handful of the traditional tracts)

Now I am not much of a tract person; I don't carry any around with me nor remember ever handing one to anybody, or sticking any under car windshield wipers, or putting them in doors. I collect and read them for ideas.

They just don't seem to fit in the contexts that I have lived my life in. They are too static for the situations where I find myself in spiritual conversations. I may use something I picked up in a tract, but if I do it will be something I scribble down on a napkin.

Contextualization means we accept that each situation is different.

Each situation needs a unique response. We won't see fruit in our modern contexts unless we understand this. This strategy of adjusting the message to the context is deep in the DNA

- of the 4 gospels. Why are there 4 gospels anyway? Because God wants to communicate the good news to different contexts.
- Epistles. Why is there more than one epistle on how to live life in a local church? Because every demographic and every church is unique.
- At the top level, God's design is to contextualize himself in Jesus... and he's still at it, contextualizing himself in us apprentices to Jesus.

This is 1 of 3 messages coming from the book of Acts

Luke's target audience: NOT Jews or Jewish Christians – it is Gentiles.

Luke's purpose for writing Acts was to build up Gentile Christian communities, especially in the face of Jewish resistance and Roman government persecution.

Seeing how Paul and others negotiated difficulties and persecution shows us a model for living as an apprentice to Jesus Christ in various contexts.

The pages of Acts include the texts of several sermons:

- Chapter 2: Peter in Jerusalem (3000 Jews become apprentices of Jesus).
- Chapter 7: Stephen in Jerusalem (Stephen so upsets his listeners that the sermon ends with his audience stoning him to death).
- Chapter 10: Peter to Cornelius' Gentile family (these become apprentices to Jesus).
- Chapter 13.13f: Paul in Antioch of Pisidia ... **today's message.**
- Chapter 14.8f: Paul in Lystra ... **next week.**

- Chapter 17.16f: Paul in Athens ... **third in this series.**
- Chapter 22: Paul's defense in Jerusalem ... tells his own story
- Chapter 24: Paul's defense to Felix ... tells his own story.
- Chapter 25: Paul's defense to Agrippa ... tells his own story

Setup Paul's sermon at Antioch of Pisidia

Paul was born in Antioch of Syria.

Antioch of Pisidia is a different place in what is today called Turkey. It was a Roman colony where many Jews lived and where there were several synagogues.

Paul knew that in a place like this 3 kinds of people attend synagogues: Jews, Gentile converts to Judaism, Gentile investigators of Judaism.

And he knew many of the Gentiles were prominent women, partially because Jews treated women better than Gentiles did (and in the first century, Christians treated women still better).

Since Antioch of Pisidia had a similar demographic to his own hometown, he knew how to get things started. So, on the Jewish Sabbath he went to the synagogue because he knew religious people gathered there and he figured he might get a chance to speak because:

- He has strong Jewish credentials as an educated Pharisee.
- He had recent and extensive experience in Jerusalem.
- He lived most of his life in the Gentile world much like theirs.

So he waited patiently through the normal agenda, knowing it would include a reading from Old Testament history and from an Old Testament prophet.

Eventually he was invited to speak. He instinctively chose the religious Jews in the room as his target audience – because he knew they are in charge.

To establish common ground, Paul retells a familiar Old Testament story, which he knew they already loved.

Then he extended the story to John the Baptist and Jesus, especially connecting these to the Old Testament prophecy using Ps 2.7, Ps 16, Is 49, Is 55, Hab 1.5.

Finally, Paul offers the listeners redemption from their sin based not on strict obedience to the Jewish law but instead on faith in this Jesus.

Acts 13:32-39 (NLT) "And now we are here to bring you this Good News. The promise was made to our ancestors,³³ and God has now fulfilled it for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus...³⁸ "Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins.³⁹ Everyone who believes in him is declared right with God—something the Law of Moses could never do.

The results

The initial response was good enough to get invited back the next week. But by then the

leading Jews, those in charge, his target audience, generally rejected the message.

But the minority Gentiles embraced Paul's message.

So Paul turned his focus from the original target audience to the Gentiles who received the seed of the good news into the soil of their hearts/lives.

Soon Paul is chased out of town by his Jewish brothers, leaving the gospel seed to take shape in the context of Psidia.

That seed turns into a church, and then another ...

In the next chapter, Paul visits another city/synagogue

And his approach was virtually the same.

Over and over the target Jewish audience is resistant or hostile; the minority Gentile audience largely trusts their future to Jesus.

Principles for us

Go where there are people who are not apprentices to Jesus.

Even if it is inconvenient.

Paul took a long, difficult trip to get to Antioch of Pisidia. We may have to walk across the street, or take time to have coffee with a coworker, or some such thing.

Leave the tracts at home.

These have some value in a very receptive context, but not in a resistant context. They are a real "turn off" for many in western culture.

Instead, listen to the questions our FRANs

(Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors) are really asking, before we respond.

Live close to God through prayer/scripture/worship/fellowship.

Pray for your FRANs. Soon enough they will ask questions – they really will.

Expect the Holy Spirit to help you read the situation and prompt you of how to respond.

It may be using words, maybe taking action, maybe showing sympathy. As we live close to God, he will do this.

Some cultures/contexts are more responsive than others

We simply must accept this fact. The people of every culture are valuable to God; but all cultures are not equal.

Europe/North Americans: people born in the affluent west are generally resistant.

Immigrants from poor countries and people who are suffering or oppressed are more

receptive to the Christian message. They know they are not self-sufficient, and often the Spirit has already prompted them that they need help from a great God to survive. They are happy to discover that there is a great and powerful God who loves them enough to suffer for them. Such people have always been more receptive to the Christian good news. They still are.

Behave so people might respond to you as they did to Paul:

Acts 13:15 (NLT) ¹⁵ After the usual readings from the books of Moses and the prophets, those in charge of the service sent them this message: "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, come and give it."

Leaders saw something in Paul/Barnabas that looked encouraging, hopeful!

Then... "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Pet 3.15.

Use scripture sparingly unless the listener already respects it – such as Paul did when he spoke in the synagogue.

When Martin Luther King spoke in Memphis the week he was killed, he spoke to a biblically literate black audience. When he said the short phrase, "I've been to the mountaintop", 'promise land,' and "Canaan," everybody in the auditorium was already intimately familiar with the Old Testament stories that contain these words. King could speak 1 word and invoke the understanding of 50 chapters of scripture! But this only works when the audience is biblically literate. So before we start quoting scripture in a spiritual conversation, we need to consider the context.

There is 1 core message, but many ways to contextualize it.

Acts 20:21 (NLT) I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.

Our core message centers on how the life/death/resurrection of Jesus offers redemption from hopelessness for every person – regardless of their background – who dares to believe it enough to trust Jesus with the rest of their life.

Instead of telling a brand new story, proclaim a new chapter in a story people already know. One that highlights the core message of Christian faith: a new life is available for all who will abandon the old way and trust Jesus.

Paul does it here in Psidia; he'll do it again in Lystra next week, and again in Athens the following.

Realize: we are challenging our FRANs (Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors) to reinterpret large pieces of story they already know, and usually people need some time to absorb and consider something this big. So give them time, but make a note to revisit the concept with them later.

Other resources:

Click on the link for the [Google Presentation](#). (Similar to PowerPoint)

Free subscription to email or RSS feeds available at [IsbellOnline News](#).