

## Preaching in regions beyond (Acts 13)

R. Cowie. November 2019 Notes based on a Sunday talk (exhortation).

It is impossible to notice that so much of the New Testament consists of carefully constructed argument against the mindset behind Judaistic thinking.

Jesus Christ spent **almost no time** raging against the iniquities of Rome, the failures of Pilate or even the against the vicious politics of the Herods....

Jesus did not come in his first advent to reform nations but to transform individuals to be the core of his kingdom -preparing king priests who will assist him to completely change the world.

Jesus did not even dwell on the sins of men all that much....Yes....he commanded sinners to "sin no more" and gave us clear moral boundaries....but any fair appraisal of the NT shows he spent the vast bulk of his time and energy combatting the legalistic thinking that had sadly gripped Jewish religion.

In the Gospels- We have so many forceful and public denunciations of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, lawyers, often in very severe and insulting terms (hypocrites, blind leaders of the blind, fools, whited sepulchres, dangerous leaven).

Frequent remonstrance came from the mouth of Jesus about how religion had been twisted out of shape by overly zealous minds...Teaching for doctrines the commandments of men

Jesus challenged the Sabbath mentality as the worst example - so many of the Sabbath healings Jesus performed were deliberately provocative....7 in all)

**All of them could have waited another day**- none of the conditions he treated were life threatening -but he challenged the mindset that thought that by doing nothing God was glorified.

However, the hardest issue for Jews was to accept that God's patience with them as a national *ecclesia* (church) had virtually expired. They failed to perceive that Yahweh now intended to leave their house desolate, and that He would turn to the despised Gentiles. They had been God's exclusive nation for 1500 years, and took it for granted that somehow, they deserved it.

No matter how much Jesus alluded to this longstanding intention of God to include gentiles... no matter how clearly that call of the Gentiles was predicted in the prophets, no matter how clearly the promises to Abraham spoke of "all nations being blessed...and Abraham as the Father of many nations' ...the Jews still mistook their accidental birth into God's chosen people as something that set them apart, and made them special..

We know that to zealous Jews ...they regarded all non- Jews as dogs, uncircumcised and unclean. As if your race, determined your righteousness.

Yet Jesus said..." other sheep I have, which are not of this fold" ...He spoke of God's house of prayer **for ALL nations**. He made forays into Gentile areas and healed thousands of Gentiles.

He healed a Syrophenician, cured many gentile Gadarenes, fed 4000 gentiles, converted Centurions and many Samaritans.... all deliberate acts which brought revulsion and anger from the zealous Jews.

Much of Jesus example and teaching among the Gentiles was to prepare his disciples to see that with God- only personal faith and obedience matter.... not the accident of birth.

Jesus made it clear to the Apostles that they would be sent to all nations .."Go into all the world and preach the Gospel **to every creature** " ...Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem , and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the **uttermost parts of the earth**. Absolutely clear what he expected.

**Notwithstanding this clear instruction from Jesus....**the disciples of Christ were very slow to throw off their ingrained Jewish mentality ...the inborn contempt toward Gentiles persisted much longer than it should have.

This JEWISH PREJUDICE WAS SO INGRAINED THAT EVEN THE DISCIPLES STRUGGLED WITH THE CONCEPT...that God could work outside Jewry

We note from *Acts 6v7...the ecclesia (church) soon included many priests ...now out of a job...no longer supported by tithes and offerings...most would have been previously Sadducees- now convinced by the resurrection (something they had once scorned)*.

Let us look at how God had embarked on an education process.

**Stephen first makes a fantastic exposition against this attitude**

**Note...he was charged with heresy on two counts**

The issue of Stephens conflict is summarised in Acts 6 v13-14:

1. Is Jerusalem the only place God can be acceptably worshipped.?
2. Are the customs of the Law of Moses unchangeable?

Acts 7 contains Stephens brilliant exposition in reply...Look at the places God has worked...outside the land (Ur, Haran, Egypt, v.16, Sychar, wilderness, ...all outside their temple and Jerusalem ...v.48

The Jews could not stand the logic of Stephen and its implications.

But sadly, these ingrained attitudes were firmly entrenched in the Jerusalem Ecclesia ...despite the clear words of Jesus.

**So GOD HAD TO TAKE A VERY FIRM HAND TO GET THE GOSPEL MOVING OUTSIDE OF JEWS in the first century ...Direct action was needed to educate the apostles to lead the way in fulfilling the command of Jesus ...preach to every creature ...a remarkable sequence of events follows...through these chapters**

NOTE- Reversal here of the Tower of Babel...when the earth was divided according to the Sons of Noah.... A division achieved by confusing ...languages ...now men who have been given power to speak all languages ...were sent out.

Chap 8...Ethiopian Eunuch- a man from Ham... Acts 9 ...A Shemite /a Hebrew of the Hebrews – Saul of Tarsus, and the in Acts 10...a man of Japheth...a Roman...a, soldier, a centurion...all come into the one saving faith

### **LET US TRACE THIS REMARKABLE SEQUENCE OF EDUCATION ...in Acts 8-10**

Acts 8...sees the beginning of the intense and murderous persecution of Saul.

8v1...God now **forcibly scattered** the disciples away from Jerusalem....opened up the areas where the gospel would now go (Jesus had predicted a witness in Samaria and the to the ends of the earth )...First result was in Samaria...Philip, one of the 7 deacons chosen to serve tables ..went and spoke the word...performed many miracles...with great results in conversions ...

What a challenge this effort presented for the Jews...but also for the Jewish apostles...Samaritans accepting the Gospel!! ...so, they send down Peter and John...John who had once suggested to Jesus that he call down fire on these same Samaritans ...the apostles were now are faced with incontrovertible evidence that God is at work here 8v25 ...

Looking at these miracles- They must have pondered...why God did not immediately use miracles to stop Saul's cruel persecutions? (many saints had been put to death) ...but rather than save them he worked mightily in Samaria ...8v7

And also, then the Holy Spirit gifts fall on Samaritans...v16-17

- 8v26 Now Philip was immediately despatched by God to convert and baptise the Ethiopian Eunuch...
- Here was a man who **did worship the God of Israel**...but who was barred from the temple services, because of his inflicted physical condition...a man who was not of the Semitic races...
- BUT he is converted and baptised...NOTE...direct the angelic direction IN ALL OF THIS.
- Note where God now sent Philip v40 ... picks him up and drops him 40km away Azotus (near GAZA). In the land of the Philistines.
- Later Philip moves to Caesarea.... still preaching...he is now in the Roman capital in Israel (seat of the Roman governors)

IN Chapter 9...Saul the Pharisee/ Hebrew of the Hebrews...is dramatically confronted by Christ and then ...is specifically sent **to the gentiles**...v15

### **LETS NOW SEE in Chpeter 9 ...the amazing chain of events that follow ...aimed at the pervasive Jewish prejudice inside the ecclesia (church). ..**

9v32...Peter heads toward Philistia... (Sharon v35) ...seems the spirit is also driving him on a distinct course...into non-Jewish territory.

First he has to deal with a very sick man (a defiling experience) ...the first incident in a series of unclean things

- 9v40...Peter next faced with a dead body... raises Dorcas

- Then he arrives in JOPPA...why was he sent here? Vital to note it was from here that Jonah tried to run away from preaching to Gentiles...From people he felt would not and should not receive God's word. NOTE Jesus had called Peter; **Simon-bar Jona**...son of Jonah....now he has the same choice to make at Joppa.
- 9v43...Then sent to stay with a man who was a tanner...hence... a permanently unclean man...a man who smelt and looked awful
- Tanning is a vile occupation. The tanner jumps into pits of horrible mixtures of dyes and excrement to ensure the skins are fully prepared for dyeing
- It leaves very permanent colouring and a smell that will not go away.
- But this is a man whose name he also shares the name of ...SIMON...perhaps this was to show PETER we are all in need of God's mercy ...This was a preparation for Cornelius.
- 10V1 God now wanted to call a Gentile...not just any Roman, not just a soldier, but to the Jewish mind the worst kind of Roman...a centurion of an order close to Caesar. Much work had to be done to prepare Peter for this. Angels were working overtime on both parties...here
- In Acts 10 we have the visions of unclean animals.
- ITS CLEAR in 10 v15...God does call even Roman centurions...it is not ours to judge men by our individual standards and racial prejudices.
- V28... Peter still struggles with his ingrained Jewish thinking.
- Peter seems to see the issue clearly.... v34-35...Great confession ...but he is still cautious ...Then we have the **only time in the Bible that the spirit gifts fell on men who were not yet baptised...v45**
- THIS ASTONISHED THE 6 JEWISH disciples who had come with Peter.
- V47...their inclination had been to withhold baptism...of Romans.

#### IMMEDIATE CONTROVERSY ERUPTS IN THE JERUSALEM ECCLESIA (Church). 11v1-2

We are told that many former Pharisees and priests had joined the Jerusalem ecclesia (church) ...and even though they now believed in Jesus Christ...they struggled to shake off their exclusive racial attitudes..and their commitment to the Law of Moses

- Note this ingrained resistance to Gentiles...and adherence to customs... (not eating with gentiles ...where do you find that in the law of Moses...cp Duet 26v12-Jews had to share their feasts with strangers?) This law of exclusion was something Jews had added to avoid possible contaminations and defilement.
- As so often happens -a manmade precept had over time become a matter of principle and a flag of distinction.
- REMEMBER...this criticism is happening inside the *ecclesia* (church). Some strongly objected to Peter eating with the converted Gentiles...they had heard that these men had received God's word, were granted spirit gifts and were baptised in faith ...**but what caught their attention?** That Peter had eaten with unwashed Gentiles.

- It reminds you of the Pharisees criticising the man from the pool of Bethesda...witnessing the amazing cure he had just been given...but all they can see is a man carrying a bed on the Sabbath.
- It just shows you how much we must ensure that we never allow the “commandments of men” to obscure the work God is trying to achieve.

So back to ACTS 11. Despite such clear indicators from God about Gentiles being included...There continued to be tremendous pressure from the Converted Jews against the Gentiles being regarded as spiritual equals. There would be tensions for many years in most *ecclesias* (churches).

Even after the events of Acts 7/8/9 and 10 this attitude prevailed. .... note ACTS 11v19...Still an inclination to preach to Jews only....

IN ACTS 13...we see Paul preaching the resurrected Jesus. Goes to Jews first...confronts the same Jewish prejudice...and resentment against the gentiles hearing the Word

ACTS 13v42-48

**It was very soon after this first journey that Peter...dissembles at Antioch in Syria and separates himself from eating with the Gentiles...and Paul has to administer that very public rebuke found in Gal 2 ...to avoid a disaster.**

We next see the debate come to a head at the Jerusalem Conference

Acts 15v1...**except you be circumcised ye cannot be saved???** This caused inevitable disputation. Note v10...Peter is now back on the correct page...backing up Paul and Barnabas.

Finally, it took James to remind them of Cornelius v14... Just as God had visited Abraham in Ur...so God had very visibly visited Cornelius.

And James Nailed it finally by recourse to the Jewish scriptures... v15-17

SO, WHAT DOES THAT PROCESS OF EDUCATION TEACH US...

1. How easily we can fall into Judaistic thinking...commandments of men, often made with the best of intentions, can easily gain traction as being scriptural principles
2. The Judaistic attitude notices and records the shortcoming of others (I thank thee I am not as this publican) , it makes comparisons ...and deep down is rooted in pride...I thank thee I am not as other men.
3. In recent years many of our members have been exposed to the way the Truth takes root in the Missions fields...We see incredible faith in people from totally different cultures and backgrounds to our own
4. Now that we have more Christadelphians from a ESL background...than westerners...We see that truly GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS ...we perhaps have learnt God IS the Father to many nations...and is not an Englishman after all. In Christ must eschew all racial prejudices.

We rightly condemn any obvious immorality...But also Let us be so careful of the sins of the spirit...Pride, overconfidence, being too quick to judge others by our own preferences, sometimes being very focussed on externals, while at the same time ignoring malice, ambition and manipulation.

BUT LET US ALSO REJOICE THAT GOD IS SENDING HIS TRUTH INTO ALL CORNERS OF THE GLOBE

Pauls desire was to preach the Gospel in regions beyond...further and further out (2 Cor 10v16). To make the gentiles obedient in word and deed (Rom 14v18)

We have many opportunities today to preach in regions beyond, in the isles of the sea. Converts in this land of dwelling carelessly are getting harder to come by...

Witness locally here we must continue to do ...but the time has now come to also focus on those places where the soil is ready and waiting for the incorruptible seed of God's word

REV 5v10- the king priests of the age to come will come from all nations of the earth...we can help fulfil that prophecy. By bringing in the Gentiles

ROMANS 15v8-12 We gentiles are here today by God's good grace ...Christ died to confirm the promises made to the fathers ...

As we consider the price paid for our salvation today...let us think of our gratitude, and how we might show it.

ACTS DEMONSTRATES THE POWER OF CHRISTS RESURRECTION

***Acts 4v13 Transformed the disciples***

***Converted totally unwilling witnesses...like Saul of Tarsus ...and priests***

***To the thoughtful mind the greatest argument for the resurrection of Christ must always be the fact that Christianity rose with its founder.***

***Nothing but his resurrection can explain the transformation of the men we saw running in panic from Gethsemane- into the fearless evangelists we find in the book of Acts.***

-Melva Purkis –Life of Jesus

So should the resurrection empower us.

ROM 4 v23-25

IF we believe Christ rose- then God IS...then God has a plan, then God wants to save us, and will forgive us and will save us .