

YOU

Bible Study

Sermon Series: How to Share Christ
To be used with: Share the Message
Sermon Title Possibilities: Who's Afraid of Evangelism?
Scripture: Acts 18:1-11

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study "How to Share Christ," these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: One of the all-time great war movies is "The Sands of Iwo Jima". John Wayne played a Marine sergeant who is put in charge of a rifle squad. One of my favorite scenes is when the men are on an amtrac heading for the beach at Iwo Jima. Three of the men are new to the squad, and one of them says he feels sick. Another Marine tells him, "I understand. I felt the same way at Tarawa!" One of the other new men walks up to John Wayne and says "Sarge, I'm scared!" The sergeant replies, "So am I." The young man is surprised. He says, "Not you!" After all, the sergeant always seemed like a tough guy, and this is his third battle. The sergeant replies, "I'm always scared!"

Fear is a natural reaction when you're facing danger or uncertainty. Anyone who has fought in a war or faced some other life-threatening situation knows that. I've often said the difference between a brave man and a coward is not that a brave never gets scared. The difference is a brave man doesn't let his fears control him. I've been a pastor a long time, and through the years I've discovered the word "evangelism" strikes fear into the hearts of many people. They don't know how people are going to respond, and they fear being rejected or worse. How do we overcome those fears?

The context.

A. Paul had just arrived in Corinth.

1. Corinth was a notoriously wicked city.
 - a. It was on the isthmus that connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to the mainland of Greece. Thus, it was an important center of trade and commerce.
 - b. It was home to the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of fertility. This temple had once employed a thousand prostitutes.
 - c. If a person had compromised himself morally, people would say he had been "Corinthianized".
2. He encountered two Jews named Aquila and Priscilla.
 - a. They were from Rome, but the Roman emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave the city.
 - The Roman historian Suetonius recorded this banishment of Jews. He said it was due to a disturbance involving "Chrestus," which many historians believe is an alteration of the name "Christ". Evidently, some Jews in Rome had become believers in Jesus, and it caused such a controversy among the Jews that Claudius ordered all of them to leave the city.

- b. They were tentmakers, as was Paul, so they invited Paul to stay with them at their home.
- B. He went right to work preaching the Gospel.
 - 1. Why did Paul always begin in the synagogue?
 - a. It was customary to allow visiting rabbis to teach the Scripture lesson, so this gave Paul an opportunity to tell them about Jesus.
 - b. Besides Paul had a special burden for his countrymen (Rom. 10:1).
 - 2. Like Paul, we should take advantage of the opportunities God gives us.
 - a. God does not call all people to be preachers, but He does command all of us to share the good news of Jesus.
 - b. The opportunities are all around you if you just look for them.
 - I remember a speaker at a pastors' conference years ago who gave some words of encouragement to bi-vocational pastors. He said, "You don't know how good you've got it! Many of us have to go out and look for prospects, but you have them right there with you on the job!" The same holds true for schoolteachers, businessmen, workers, or anyone else in the secular world.

The counterattack.

- A. Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth.
 - 1. He had left them behind in Berea.
 - a. The Jews of Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the crowds against Paul. Thus, Paul made a hasty departure.
 - b. Paul went to Athens, where he preached his famous sermon at Mars Hill, and then he went on to Corinth.
 - 2. Silas and Timothy finally caught up with Paul in Corinth, and Paul "was pressed in the spirit".
 - a. Other translations say, "he devoted himself fully to the word". That is, he left tentmaking and focused exclusively on preaching.
 - b. Paul often wrote about the generosity of Macedonian churches, so it's likely Silas and Timothy had brought a generous offering from these churches to support Paul in his work.
 - One of my seminary professors used to say, "It's not unscriptural for a church to pay the pastor a salary, and it's not unspiritual for a pastor to work and support himself."
- B. The Jews in Corinth soon turned against Paul.
 - 1. They "opposed themselves and blasphemed".
 - a. If you get serious about evangelism, the devil will put all kinds of obstacles in your way, including your fears.
 - b. It's neither wise nor scriptural to keep witnessing to people who simply refuse to listen (Mark 6:11).
 - 2. Paul announced that he would go to the Gentiles instead.
 - a. He started a church in the home of Justus, whose house was right next to the synagogue.
 - b. Crispus, "the chief ruler of the synagogue", became a believer.
 - A synagogue "ruler" was usually a layman who took care of the various administrative details.

The consolation.

- A. During the night, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision.

1. “Be not afraid” – Literally, “Stop being afraid.”
 - a. He had already angered people with his preaching.
 - b. He had already endured persecution in Philippi, so he knew it was only a matter of time before it started in Corinth.
 2. He assured Paul that he was not alone.
 - a. Many people in the city were on His side.
 - b. More importantly, the Lord Himself was with Paul.
- B. Paul was later brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia.
1. The Jews accused him of preaching heresy.
 - a. Before Paul could offer any defense, Gallio dismissed the case.
 - b. Gentiles in the area beat up Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue (he had evidently replaced Crispus).
 2. Why did Luke feel led to record this sad incident?
 - a. Evidently, Sosthenes later became a believer (1 Corinthians 1:1).
 - b. It showed that the Lord had kept His promise to take care of Paul.

Conclusion: When I was little, every schoolboy’s hero was Evel Knievel. His real name was Robert Knievel, but he called himself Evel Knievel, and he was famous for his motorcycle stunts. He had a number of successful jumps, but if you’ll recall, he also had quite a few nasty accidents. I remember when he died several years ago. A friend of mine said she never understood why he called himself “Evel Knievel.” With all the crazy stunts he pulled, she thought “stupid” would be a more fitting adjective! I had to agree. I admired him when I was little, but as I got older, I realized that much of what he did was foolish. “The Guinness Book of World Records” noted that Evel Knievel was a pioneer in motorcycle stunts, but it also said he didn’t hold very many records, other than 433 broken bones. That seems a high price to pay just for a little fame.

It’s foolish to risk life and limb for things that don’t really matter. However, the gospel of Jesus Christ matters. It makes the difference whether someone spends eternity in heaven or hell. Put aside your fears and take a risk to tell someone about Jesus. Some will reject you, but others will believe, and they make it all worthwhile.

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