

BaptistWay Bible Series for November 18: Witness in diverse ways to diverse people

November 10, 2012

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One of my mentors used to say: “Jesus isn’t just nice; he is brilliant.” That is so true. I want to add something to that thought: “Jesus isn’t just nice; he is beautiful.”

In our three stories, the Apostle Paul is sharing the gospel with three different groups of people. The beauty of Jesus Christ comes shining through in each story.

The jailer obviously is moved by the supernatural happenings in the jail. This leads Paul to share of the beauty of Jesus Christ. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (16:31). How beautiful! Jesus has the power to change, to save, everyone in your family. But it’s larger than that. His “household” likely meant a multigenerational family.

Do you remember the Walton’s? They lived in a multigenerational home. Most of the people in Bible times lived in very close proximity to all their relatives. This is their “household.” Paul says, your wife, your kids, your parents, your grandparents, your great-grandparents, your employees, your helpers ... your whole household is about to be overwhelmed with the gospel message of Jesus Christ. “He was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family” (v. 34).

What an amazing sense of God’s goodness must have washed over this

entire family as they believed together. Can you imagine how many subsequent generations must have followed Christ because of this one story? Can you imagine the joy you would experience if your entire extended family became followers of Christ all the same day? It's beautiful isn't it? Jesus is beautiful.

The next story is about Thessalonica. Paul, following his normal routine, went to the synagogue. But did you notice something subtle? He is patient. "And on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them ..." (17:2). He allowed the gospel time to sink in.

Have you ever known anyone who was frantic with the gospel? "You have to accept this today" often is on their lips. "You are not guaranteed a tomorrow." Pressure, pressure. Let me tell you something: When the gospel message is pressure oriented, it is us-centered, not them-centered.

Paul returns on three consecutive Sabbath days. He "reasons," "explains" and "proves" according to Acts 17:2-3. No hard-pressure sell. He obviously dialogues with them. There is an interchange of thought and idea. Not all believe, and Paul is ok with that. It's beautiful. Paul doesn't push his way in, using scare tactics and pressure techniques. In doing so, he follows the beautiful path of Jesus Christ. He loves, dialogues and shares truth, and he (Christ) and he (Paul) both trust the Holy Spirit for results.

Jesus didn't push his way into your life. He was patient with you. He met you with the gospel on your timetable. Ever seen these t-shirts? "Turn or Burn!" "Get Right or Get Left." Or this unbelievable one that made my stomach churn: "Get Saved or Get Microwaved" (Yes, I saw that shirt in the 90s). Jesus looks right into some of our stupid Christian t-shirts and says: "No. Patience. I don't want a quick convert. I want an intentional disciple."

In doing so, Jesus is beautiful. He, the author of time, is gracious enough to give us the time to believe. Sadly, many reject his beautiful message. Yet he

never forces his way in.

And then there is Athens. Paul demonstrates something amazing and Christlike in this city. Surrounded by what is described as snobbish, look-down-my-glasses at you intellectuals who like to listen to themselves talk, Paul establishes a beautiful rapport. I would have gone in with Texas gospel guns a blazin'! "You guys think you are so smart ... don't you."

But evidently, Paul takes a totally different approach. How do I know this? One simple phrase from Acts. "We want to hear you again on this subject" (v. 32). He could have schooled these know-it-all intellectuals who didn't author two-thirds of the New Testament.

Instead, he must have been patient with them. Perhaps he listened to their questions. Perhaps he added extra cream to his mocha latte and embraced the stimulating discussion. Whatever the case, he left the door open for more discussion about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's beautiful.

After all, that's exactly what Jesus did for you this very day. You were tempted to do something immoral. You even left the plan open to carry out your immorality tomorrow. But your eyes still function. Your lungs still breathe. He says, "Let's discuss this more tomorrow." He continues to work in our lives even as we plot out someone else's demise. He continues to use us even though our thoughts and motives are not pure, holy and righteous. Don't believe me? Ask your pastor.

God continues to work out righteousness in your life. And if you dare open your Bible tomorrow (even with your quiet, evil plans still intact), your Bible won't explode in your face. Rather, its words of life lovingly will steer you away from sin and toward righteous living. Now, that's beautiful. But what do you expect? That's Jesus.

Paul created an environment where he could continue to lead others in the gospel. Sounds like a good plan for your church to me.

Paul created an environment where he could continue to lead others in the gospel. Sounds like a good plan for your church to me (not a typo friends—I just thought you should work on that one).

Love is patient. God is patient with you (2 Peter 3:9). So, share Christ in diverse ways like Paul. Be patient. Be more concerned about loving the other person than converting the other person.

Follow Jesus. He is beautiful.

Since we are morphing your Bible study group into a “Bible-doing” group, I have three possible applications for you this week:

1. What minority group lives in your area? How can your class show them the love of Jesus Christ? Be diverse with the gospel on purpose!
2. You probably have some sort of a pregnancy crisis or assistance center in your area. These organizations always are looking for Christian volunteers. Could someone in your class begin a personal ministry here?
3. If you want to be radical, study the demographics of your county. There are many ethnicities around you, more than likely. Does your church reach out to all ethnicities? Challenge your church to looking beyond the predominant culture in your church. Let’s be diverse like Paul.