

# *The Greatest Missionary in Acts*

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*TEXT: "To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The apostle Paul is "God's Exhibit A" in the early church. He calls himself "a man in Christ" (2 Corinthians 12:2), but what a man! You could dump whole nations into the ocean and they would not be missed nearly as much as he would be.

### **I. HE KNEW HE WAS A CHOSEN VESSEL**

The Lord told him that he was to be "a minister and a witness" of what he had seen (Acts 26:16). He told Timothy that Jesus has "enabled me, . . . for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service" (1 Timothy 1:12). He marched every day to the drum beat of the Master. He sought no praise save that of his Lord. He was not cowed by public opinion and did not keep his eye upon the polls. Rather, he said: "If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Certainly none of us are apostles, but all Christians are chosen vessels in one sense of the word. We have been called to do God's work in a wicked world. That work will go undone unless we do it. The church is the pillar and ground of truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Unless we preach the truth, it will go unpreached in this generation.

### **II. HE WAS WILLING TO WAIT ON THE LORD**

Like Jesus, who came "in the fulness of time," Paul also went out when the time was ripe. Estimates are that nine years ensued from his conversion in Acts 9 until his call to the mission field in Acts 13. Those years were spent in preaching and preparation of his heart and mind. He was in Arabia, Damascus, Tarsus, Jerusalem, and Antioch. He was willing to wait for the time to come in God's own order. Without doubt,

fortunes have been swept away because churches and individuals have rushed to reap mission fields for which they were unprepared. They went out untrained in the language, the customs, the geography, and the religious beliefs of the nation. They were unprepared in body, in mind, and in knowledge of the Scripture.

### **III. HE WAS A PIONEER**

Paul wrote, "Yea, making it my aim so to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation" (Romans 15:20). He was a place-maker, not a place-taker! He was determined to plant the seed, not just water what others had planted. Of course, he did not disparage the efforts of those who came after him. He believed that "he that planteth and he that watereth are one" (1 Corinthians 3:8). Yet it was the burning desire of his life to preach where Christ had not already been proclaimed.

### **IV. HE CAREFULLY SELECTED HIS FIELD OF LABOR**

Jesus warned His apostles not to cast their pearls before swine. Not all people are receptive to spiritual truth. Not all fields are equally fertile and not all men are equally effective in every field. Paul shook off the dust of his feet at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:51), but he remained in Ephesus for two years and "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10).

### **V. HE DID NOT GO OUT ALONE**

Paul followed the pattern of Jesus, who sent His apostles out in groups. When he went into Asia, six men accompanied him (Acts 20:4). From time to time his coworkers included Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and others. How easy it is today for one man and his family to grow discouraged working alone in a vast mission field.

## **VI. HE CAREFULLY CHOSE HIS COLABORERS**

The measure of man's effectiveness depends much upon the caliber of people he can attract to his cause. Barnabas was highly respected, being called "Son of exhortation" (Acts 4:36). Timothy from his childhood had know the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). Luke was known as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). When handling money, Paul had accompanying him "whomsoever ye shall approve" (1 Corinthians 16:3). He urged Timothy to commit the teaching to faithful men (2 Timothy 2:2). How important it is that our missionaries, our preachers, and our elders and deacons be chosen carefully. We can no more build a church around unfaithful men than we can carve a masterpiece out of rotten wood! The task and mission of the church is so great that only faithful men can be used.

## **VII. HE SOUGHT TO KEEP THE LINE OF COMMUNICATION OPEN BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND MISSIONARY**

Paul gathered the Antioch church together and "rehearsed all things that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27). He expressed his appreciation to the Philippian church for their fellowship in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). Apparently, this church had sent Epaphroditus to the apostle Paul (Philippians 4:18). He handled money responsibly, insisting that representatives of the churches go with him to Jerusalem to take the contribution for the saints (1 Corinthians 16:3, 4). There must be mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation between the churches and their missionaries.

## **VIII. PAUL DID NOT INSIST UPON A CHANGE IN THE CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE**

Nowhere did he seek to make the Gentiles behave as Jews or the Jews as Gentiles. He even went to Jerusalem to clarify this matter with the other apostles (Acts 15). His sermons in Acts 13 and 17 show that he took into consideration the background of the people to whom he preached. Many good men have failed to be good ambassadors for Jesus Christ because they also insisted upon being ambassadors for American culture and Western tradition. Where the customs of the people do not violate the will of God, we must be willing to bear with them.

## **IX. HE PREACHED TO ALL MEN**

His goal was to be "all things to all men, that I may by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22). To the weak he became as weak. To them that were without law he became as without law. To the Jews he became as a Jew. While he did not compromise the truth of God, he sought to reach down to the level where people were in order to bring them up to where Christ is. He preached to Governor Felix, Governor Festus, King Agrippa, Sergius Paulus, the deputy of Cyprus, and to those of Caesar's household. But he also preached to Onesimus, a poor, runaway slave. He preached to thieves in Ephesus (Ephesians 4:28) and to immoral Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). He counted himself as a debtor both to the Greeks and the barbarians (Romans 1:14). He sought to "present every man perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). He was interested not so much in a particular field as in a particular person. He believed that missions began whenever a sinner crossed his path. God is not willing for any to perish, nor was the apostle Paul. We, too, must preach to all men. Let us rid ourselves of the defeatist attitude which says that the poor do not care about the gospel, that the intelligent will not listen to the gospel, that the rich are irreligious, and that religious people are prejudiced against the truth!

## **X. HE LEFT THE RESULTS WITH GOD**

He reported "all things that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27). He believed that "God gave the increase" and that "neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6, 7). Perhaps we are too "success-conscious." We must preach the gospel and leave the results with the Lord. Noah had very few converts, but he was faithful and saved the world! Paul believed that he was God's man, in God's time, doing God's work, and that the Word would not return to God void. He fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith. What more can any man do?

## **CONCLUSION**

We would do well to imitate the missionary practices of Paul.

—Paul Rogers