

South Bay Church Plant Sabbath School

9 – Relational and Incarnational Evangelism

Introduction

Incarnation. (Luke 1:26-38) That moment when Jesus came as a human baby, grew up as a Jewish boy, and learned the Jewish language and culture. Today, those who study missions say that the same incarnational approach can be applied to how we do ministry. Before we can reach a culture with the gospel, we must first understand the culture by living in the shoes of the people there. Others have argued that such incarnational approaches take too long, and a focus on culture tends to dilute a focus on the gospel.

What would it look like for us to incarnate ourselves in a town or people group we are trying to reach? What benefits and challenges do you see to this approach?

Acts 16:1-5

Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised?

This seemed to go against the decree of the Jerusalem Council, that those who joined the church would *not* need to be circumcised. Yet, the results of this painful operation were clear – the churches were strengthened and grew. How far should we go in adapting to people in order to reach them?

Acts 16:6-10

Two no's and a yes. But even the no's only happened as they moved forward. As they went out in faith, the Spirit responded. Macedonia was in Europe, and this was a clear departure from Asia Minor where they had worked before.

What are some ways God might use to lead us in choosing where to plant our church?

“Through nature and revelation, through His providence, and by the influence of His Spirit, God speaks to us.” Steps to Christ, p. 93

Acts 16:11-15

Even though the Spirit had led them to Macedonia, that didn't mean the way forward was clear. The common method that Paul had used, up to that point, was to find a synagogue and begin sharing there. But in Philippi there did not appear to be that option, so he found where believers met and went to worship with them. Rather than trying to reach pagan unbelievers, he focused first on those who already believed in God and persuaded them of the truth of Jesus and let it spread from there.

How might this principle of going to the most receptive people first affect how we do ministry? What are key points from Matthew 10 as Jesus sent out His disciples? How do Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Matthew 10:14 on their missionary journey apply to the incarnational method of evangelism?

Acts 16:16-24

Even though the demon-possessed woman was saying the right words, why was Paul annoyed with her?

“The words of recommendation uttered by this woman were an injury to the cause of truth... and by them many were led to believe that the men who spoke with the Spirit and power of God were actuated by the same spirit as this emissary of Satan.” *Acts of the Apostles*, 212.

In his annoyance with the woman, did Paul make a mistake by healing her? No, because the Holy Spirit would not have healed her if it was not needed. However, notice the accusation raised by the Philippians in verses 20-21.

When is it acceptable to teach against the customs and beliefs of the people we are trying to reach? What might need to come first?

“When you are laboring in a place where souls are just beginning to get the scales from their eyes, and to see men as trees walking, be very careful not to present the truth in such a way as to arouse prejudice, and to close the door of the heart to the truth. Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them so far as possible.”
Evangelism, 140.

Acts 16:25-40

Paul and Silas end up in prison for all their good efforts. But rather than see this as a setback, they decide to turn it into a witnessing opportunity. How are they able to connect with both the prisoners and the prison guard? Sometimes the point of incarnational ministry is to bring people to the place where they ask the right question, to which we have a gospel answer (v. 30-32). How might our witness lead people to ask the right questions?

Acts 17:1-9

Paul once again starts with the God-fearing Jews and Gentiles as the most receptive audience. But in this case, it is the Jews who are not persuaded, and it is the Gentiles who respond. What accusation do the Jews level against the missionaries (v. 6-7)? If the ministry of Paul and Silas has only been silent and non-offensive, it is unlikely this accusation would have been made.

Acts 17:10-15

This seems to be a repeat and replay of what happened in Thessalonica, but what sets apart the two cities?

The goal of relational and incarnational evangelism is to get people to study the Word of God for themselves. How might this be different from preaching or giving prepared Bible studies?

“The best work you can do is to teach, to educate. Whenever you can find an opportunity to do so, sit down with some family, and let them ask questions... Take your Bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart.” *Gospel Workers*, 193.

Conclusion

In this lesson we have looked at how Paul reached different people in different ways. Relational and Incarnational evangelism means being willing to embrace others from their point of view. It means looking for bridges between us and them by which we can best share the gospel.

Comparison of Evangelistic Methods in Acts 16-17

Scripture	City	Audience	Evangelistic Method	Result
16:11-15	Philippi	Riverside Godly Women	Conversation	Lydia baptized
16:16-24	Philippi	Marketplace Slave Girl	Conversation/Oration Healing	Slave girl healed
16:25-34	Philippi	Prisoners Jailer	Praying and Singing Stepping in/Sharing Jesus	Family is baptized

17:1-9	Thessalonic a	Synagogue – Jews and Devout Greeks	Preaching/persuading	Many Gentiles
17:10-15	Berea	Synagogue – Jews and Greeks – prominent ppl	Preaching and Bible Study	Many Believed