

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 17, 2008

Often, Creatively and Earnestly Proclaim the Good News, While You Can

by Dan Trygg

“So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. ¹⁹ But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, ²⁰ Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.”
Lk. 3:18-20

I am often amazed when I see what is written in the original language of the Bible. I have spent 33 years studying the Greek New Testament, and am still taken aback by the vividness or depth of the Greek compared to most translations into English. Sometimes you come across a verse or passage that is simply “pregnant” with meaning or insight. Luke 3:18 is such a verse. On the surface, it appears simple enough, but when you take the time to see the construction of words that the author put together, and how they interrelate together to compile and build a word picture, ...and then can also view this word picture against the contrast of the larger backdrop being described by Luke..., you begin to gain a whole new appreciation for what is being said, and how it may apply to you. Let me attempt to recreate for you some of what I have come to perceive in my study of this passage.

First, let me attempt to translate the *elements* of the verse a little more precisely. **The basic core of the verse is “he gospelized the people.”** The word for “gospel” or “good news” is put into a verbal form. The implication is that to “good news” somebody is to communicate a good message. **In this context, the good message is that God is offering forgiveness and new hope to lost people.** Through repentance (a change of mind and heart, a change of worldview and purpose), God is allowing people to make a fresh start in life. Symbolized by the death, burial and rebirth of baptism, God was giving people the opportunity to put their past behind them and begin a new life of service to God with a clean slate, ...their past mistakes and old self-identity graciously removed.

This activity of “good-message-ing” is often translated to “preach” or “proclaim”, but that is not specifically prescribed by the word. It simply means to get the good message out to others in some way. **Not surprisingly, however, the form of this word indicates that the individual doing the communicating is intensely involved in the process. To communicate the message to others affects the communicator.** It is not just some off-the-cuff activity that requires nothing substantial from the person. There is passion, creativity and even risk involved. Sometimes there are repercussions for sharing the good message. **It costs something.** Obviously, it will require time and effort. **It is not necessarily convenient to share the good news with people.** It requires that we step out of our daily activities enough to engage someone else in conversation, or we “put ourselves out there” in some way or another. **It may be challenging, even uncomfortable, as we try to put our thoughts into words and express our beliefs.** We may not be used to talking to people in such a purposeful manner, especially if it is strangers we are reaching out to. We may feel our mouths go dry, or our faces go flush. We may falter and stumble over our words. We may feel the fear of being rejected. These are all ways in which we may be personally invested in the “good-news-ing” process.

This personal investment is reflected in the word used to describe the “good-news-ing” process John was doing. It is often translated as some form of “exhort”, usually rendered as a noun form in English (e.g., “exhortation”). Actually, it is a verbal form. It is a participle, an “-ing” word, used to tell us more about what John was doing to carry out the main verb. **The word literally means “inviting alongside”.** Some of the other definitions given in the lexicons are: “to summon, call to, encourage, comfort, console, implore, beg, beseech, urge, earnestly ask, demand”. It is important to see this range of meaning, so that we do not get too narrow a perception regarding how the gospel is to be presented. If we think it is always with a forceful demand or exhortation, we will tend to fall into a pattern of expression that may not always be appropriate. **The broad range of definitions indicate the intense earnest nature of John's heart, but also communicates a wide range of emotional tone and expression.** He could be demanding and “in your face”, or he could be consoling or encouraging. At times, he would urge and plead with people. At other times, he would thunderously demand a response. **The key to understanding his approach revolved around his hearers.** Some people were more emotionally and mentally predisposed to listen and respond to his message. It did not take a strong confrontation to reach them. Others were more resistant, even arrogant, and required a stronger, sterner approach. **It is important to see that the word Luke used to describe John's “gospelizing” methodology was a flexible, adjustable word, not a “one-style-fits-all” approach. He adjusted his style to be able to summon a wide variety of people.** We need to do the same. We need to adjust our presentations of the good news to be suitable to the needs, readiness and spiritual condition of those we are attempting to reach.

This perception of the use of the participle here is strengthened by two other key words. Luke did not just use a participle to tell us how John was communicating, he used a *participial phrase*. This makes even more specific what Luke was attempting to describe about John's gospelizing methods. Unfortunately, this is not clearly rendered in most translations. The two very different ideas are kind of blended together into a general mushy statement, using a prepositional phrase. "So *with* many other exhortations he preached the gospel..." is the way it is generally translated. This is a blunted gloss-over of what was intended to be a very precise, carefully crafted phrase. **Luke is literally saying, "On the one hand, wherefore, inviting-alongside many times and different ways, he gospelized the people"**. This emphasizes that John's attempts to summon-alongside the people *were numerous* and that he attempted *a variety of very different approaches*. In other words, **he communicated repeatedly and often about the good news, and he was creative in employing a wide variety of methods** or word pictures in order to communicate. This is an important insight into the life of one of God's most successful spokespersons in history. He spoke often, repeatedly, and in different ways. We see the same principles at work later in Jesus' ministry. He spoke often, in a wide variety of settings, using a great many stories, parables, exhortations, teachings and appeals. The apostle Paul also exemplified these qualities, communicating and teaching day and night in a wide variety of settings (Acts 20:20-32), even adjusting his manner of appearance and communication to be able to reach his hearers (I Cor. 9:19-23). Of course, God Himself is the Master of communication. He has appealed to us many, many times, in many portions and in a wide variety of ways, culminating in His own appearance among men in order to show His love (Heb. 1:1-3; I Jn. 4:9).

Two scripture passages come to mind that reinforce these principles. The first is from Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. This passage speaks of spreading out your investments in a number of different directions. You cannot predict what will succeed, and what will fail, so if you diversify, your losses will be minimized and you are more likely to find an exceptionally good investment. **Invest often, invest repeatedly, try different investment options.** Then vs. 4, 6 are about planting seed. If you are too concerned about finding the perfect conditions before you sow, you probably will not be sowing much at all, ...and if you don't sow, there will be nothing to reap. When you sow, sow some in the morning, and some in the evening. You never know what will be more productive, so invest in both areas. **Sow often, sow repeatedly, and try sowing under different circumstances and using different methods.**

In **Romans 12:2**, we are exhorted to "test-out-by-trial-to-discover the will of God, that which is productive, well-pleasing and mature". We find out what works by trying different options. **You try things often, repeatedly, and vary what you do so that you find what works.** In a similar fashion, communicate the good news often, repeatedly and in different ways. First, you will find those who are readily responsive to the message. Secondly, you will discover methods that work. Third, you will be there when difficult people have a moment of vulnerability or openness toward the gospel. If you have given up, those opportunities will pass by unnoticed. If, however, you are persistently sharing the good news as a way of life, you are more likely to plant that idea in their mind that will take root and begin to change that person's outlook on life. You become the catalyst toward their repentance.

"On the one hand... but..." This is a common construction in Greek, designed to show contrast. On the one hand, John was gospelizing, but Herod ...locked John up in prison." **On the one hand, John was imploring often, repeatedly and in a variety of ways, and getting tremendous results, ...but Herod shut him down and removed him to prison.** This is an important lesson for us. We do *not* have all the time in the world. Even if we become an effective communicator of the good news, **we need to remember that we have an enemy pacing back and forth, looking for any opportunity to take us out of the picture.** In our lives, it may not mean that we are thrown into jail (some of us *may* see those days – Matt. 10:14-23), but for most of us the enemy will find a way to remove us from the gospel opportunities God makes available to us. **Satan will do whatever he can to remove us from the life of anyone who seems to be responding to the good news.** He will do it by bringing up distractions, alternatives designed to keep that person from being further exposed to the message. Or, as his name, "devil", implies, he will attempt to slander you to that other person, so that they will become closed toward you. You will notice a change in the openness of the person toward you. The person who was open and curious will suddenly seem distant or closed. The enemy is probably whispering lies in their ears about you, trying to discredit you or your intentions. Prayer is our greatest tool in a situation like that, ...prayer and patience, waiting for God to open the door, once again. Or, as in this case, a "gatekeeper", a person with influence or control over a family or group of people, will be angry if we take a stand for truth in an area in which they are sinning. Suddenly we are shut down, forbidden to continue to speak of Jesus. **While we have opportunity, we must be communicating the good news often, repeatedly and creatively. Those opportunities are often temporary. Plant much, plant well, plant in different ways. Get the seed out, so that there will be a harvest.**