

Life Group Discussion Guide

Against All Odds: How the Name of Jesus Spreads
Week 10: Preach the Gospel Without Words? • Acts 14:1-7

“Preach the gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words.”

Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, this familiar phrase is quoted often within Christian circles. But there’s just one problem:

He never said it.

So, why do Christians commend this “quote” that isn’t really a quote at all? What’s the sentiment in it? That talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. This strikes a chord in us because these notions are true in many contexts. But there are other contexts in which words are the action. And when it comes to the gospel, this is the case. Pastor Jon explained it this way:

“The Greek word for ‘gospel’ is euangelion. It’s a noun, and it means ‘good news.’ But there’s also a verbal form of that noun: euangelizo. And it means ‘to proclaim the gospel,’ ‘to preach the good news.’ In other words, when it comes to the gospel (an event that was done 2,000 years ago), what we now do with it is speak it, share it, preach it, proclaim it. And all those things are done with words.”

Should our character and good works adorn the gospel? Of course. But make no mistake—the gospel is preached with words. That’s the **Big Idea** of this week’s message: **The gospel must be spoken.**

- Have you fallen into the mindset that we don’t need to speak the gospel as long as we show Christ’s character through our actions? Talk about why that’s tempting.
- How does Pastor Jon’s explanation change your perspective?

Though the gospel must be spoken, the results will not always be the same. Pastor Jon took us on a tour of three different things to anticipate when we speak the good news:

1. Speak the gospel and look for faith

After facing significant opposition in Pisidian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas head east to Iconium. This time, we’re not told what they preached, but what happened when they did:

“There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.” Acts 14:1b

For many, the effect of their speech was faith—but not for everyone. Verse 2 tells us that “the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.” And verse 5 continues, “There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their

leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.” Although the responses differed, these verses do carry one common thread: they all speak of both Jews *and* Gentiles.

Who received the gospel with faith? Jews and Gentiles. Who opposed the gospel messengers? Jews and Gentiles. The answer’s the same, which reveals something we don’t want to miss:

“We must resist the urge to think that Christians come only from certain types of people. That’s nonsense. Is the gospel for Jews or Gentiles? Is it for liberals or conservatives? Is it for atheists or religious people? Is it for rich or poor people? It’s for both. It’s for everyone—for people who hear it and receive it with faith. We must not decide ahead of time how someone will respond. We simply speak the gospel and look for faith.”

- Are there any types of people you’ve viewed as “unreachable” by the gospel?
- What justifications have you believed for why you needn’t speak the gospel to these people?
- Take time now to repent of the mindset that “those people” are unworthy or impossible to reach with the good news. Pray God would give you His heart for these individuals.

2. Speak the gospel and acknowledge works of power

After verse 2 tells of the opposition that was stirred up against Paul and Barnabas, the passage continues, “So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.”

Pastor Jon defined signs and wonders as “acts of God that transgress natural processes. They’re interventions from God that display His power and glory.”

Jesus did signs and wonders that confirmed His identity as the Son of God. In this week’s text, Paul and Barnabas are enabled to do them (by Jesus) to confirm the message they’re speaking about Him. But do signs and wonders still happen today?

“Nothing in Scripture says that signs and wonders are over. 1 Corinthians 12 lists various gifts the Holy Spirit has given to God’s people for the church age, ‘as he determines.’ The list includes ‘miraculous powers’ given to some. Accordingly, we should not be surprised when God does things that defy human understanding, whether related to the fate of the nations, the healing of the human body, the course of weather systems, and, of course, the conversion of hardened sinners, which is the greatest work of power God does by the millions.”

- Are you hesitant to believe God still works in supernatural ways? Discuss your perspectives as a group.
- How does Scripture answer the question, “Do signs and wonders still happen today?”
- Have you witnessed or heard of a supernatural act of God in our day? Can you see God’s purpose in it?

So, if God still performs signs and wonders, *should we ask for them?*

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus made it clear that He disapproved of those who had an unhealthy fascination with or demanded to see signs and wonders. Our zeal should not be for His power, but for Him. And yet, Scripture also shows there is an honoring and acceptable way to invite God to display His supernatural might.

“The early church prayed this way, ‘Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ (Acts 4:29–30) Do you think there are threats to the faith today, right here in our nation? To Christians around the world? We need to ask our God to give us great boldness in speaking the gospel and to stretch out His mighty hand to heal and perform signs and wonders as He sees fit.”

- Take time now to pray as the early church prayed, believing the power of God to heal our nation and world.

3. Speak the gospel and expect division

Having encountered the gospel message—and the signs and wonders that accompanied it—verse 4 tells us, “The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.” Here’s how Pastor Jon summed it up:

“The gospel brings division. Households are divided, friends are divided, institutions are divided, nations are divided over the Name of Jesus. As messengers for the gospel, we don’t create the division, but expect it. In the face of this division, we are kind. We are brave. And we don’t let hostility silence us.”

- Why does the gospel create division?
- What is the difference between expecting division and creating it?
- As you speak the gospel, what would it look like for you to be both kind and brave in the face of the division it may bring?

In closing, Pastor Jon left us with a challenge:

“People say a picture is worth a thousand words. Not when it comes to the gospel. God does not send us to print pictures of the cross. He sends us to speak the name of Jesus with a thousand words, in a thousand ways, in a thousand contexts and places. The gospel must be spoken.”

- To whom is God leading you to speak the gospel?
- How will you provide support and accountability to one another?