

A Great Number of Priests

Acts 6:7

Have you ever noticed that sometimes only a few words are needed to speak volumes? Our text is one such instance. *And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.* That speaks of a great number of Old Covenant priests obeying Jesus. That is a curious event given how clannish these priests could be and given that Jesus was diametrically opposed to most of what the priests believed and taught.

There's one point and an application I'd like to make.

I. The Unmitigated, Raw Power of the Gospel.

1. These priests were the least likely to obey by worldly standards.

- Remember that these priests were all members of the same extended family – the Levites. Many Levites were also Pharisees though some had fastened themselves to the Sadducees.
- Their leaders were dead set against Jesus and His teachings and were proven willing to kill to maintain the status quo.
- They had to face loss of livelihood if they converted. As a priest in Israel all their physical needs were met daily. Numbers 18 teaches us that the priests took as income all the sacrifices and offerings that were not burned. The Levites took as income the tithes paid by the people.
- Loss of position as well. In Israel the Priests were among the most respected Jews. They were looked up to by most Jews and especially the ordinary Jew.

- The Pharisees and Sadducees' hated the priests because they often disagreed with the teaching that these sects put out. The Priest that went over to Jesus' side would lose his status as a leader amongst the Israelites.

2. God was preached to them. The Power of God was applied.

- When Zacharias saw the angel in the temple.
- They saw the 12-year-old Jesus answering the rabbis.
- They heard Jesus' teaching and saw His miracles.
- They witnessed the tearing of the veil from top to bottom at the death of Christ.
- They heard the sound from Heaven and heard the apostles speaking in tongues and saw the cloven tongues like as of fire on the Day of Pentecost.
- They witnessed the healing of the man at the Beautiful Gate. (The Chief Priests couldn't deny the miracle.)

3. These wonders were designed by God to create faith John 20:30-31
³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

4. The power of the Gospel is such that, no matter the circumstances, when it contacts a good and honest heart, there is conversion

- Rom. 1:16 ***For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.***
- Jer. 23:29 ***“Is not My word like a fire?” says the LORD, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?”***

- Heb. 4:12 *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

II. The Application – From Whom Do We Withhold the Gospel?

Most of us are quick to make judgments about people we meet. We are in good company. Even the Apostles made this mistake, so Jesus taught them a lesson on fertile ground. We must learn that everyone we meet is a potential candidate for the good news of Jesus.

One of the things I have noticed over the years is that we in the church tend to write off whole areas or peoples because of what we have “heard” about them. Sometimes there is some merit to these findings but normally they are just assumptions with no real basis in fact. Maybe you have heard some of these or possibly used them yourself.

1. From the Northeast because it’s a “Difficult Field.”
2. From our friends? “Wouldn’t be interested.”
3. Europeans? “Won’t believe.”
4. Young people? “Too worldly.”
5. Old people? “Set in their ways.”
6. Family? “Won’t listen.”
7. The Powerful? “Don’t think they need the Gospel.”
8. The Lowly? “Need food, not piety.”

If we use these as our benchmarks, we’re running out of people to preach the Gospel to!! What we need to remember is that the determining factor is a good and honest heart (Luke 8:15) *“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”*

If we just look at one area where God deals with man it might help put this concept into perspective for us.

Think about something as simple as rain. God does not withhold rain from wicked people. God sends the rain indiscriminately to all mankind. He does not see one class of people above or below another. Since God provides rain for all – how do you suppose He wants us to share the good news of His Son??

I am convinced that God wants the gospel to be sown by His people indiscriminately and that we are to withhold the gospel from no person. Of course, this means that each of us must have some responsibility to share the good news with others. This will be done by each of us in our own way and in our own time. You will not have the opportunities that I have nor will I have what you have. That is what makes evangelism so neat – the sowers can reach tons of people. So how do we begin??

So, how do we go about sharing the gospel with others?? Let's see what Paul said in Col. 4:1-6 *Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. ² Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; ³ meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, ⁴ that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

Paul begins with the request for prayer that doors would be open to him to share the gospel. Not a bad place for us to begin. Praying and asking God to present opportunities has proved beneficial to me over the years. I am amazed at how God does this when I least expect it.

The second thing Paul mentions is that he would make the word manifest. Manifest here means clear. So, when we share the good news we need to make it clear to the one we're teaching. It is not a session where we try to win an argument. It is a matter of letting God's word speak clearly to the prospect.

The third thing Paul discusses is to walk in wisdom toward those outside. This means that our manner of life needs to be Christ like – especially to non-Christians. All of us can accomplish this with God’s help.

Finally, Paul tells us to make our speech seasoned with salt. That is that our speech would be pure and acceptable to the outsider. This also goes to his point of being able to answer each one. No one will pay much attention to us if our speech is impure and we do not behave in a way that shows that we love Jesus.

No one expected a great many priests to become Christians – but they did. We ought to expect everyone we meet to have a desire to want Jesus. It ought to surprise us when they don’t!!

Let’s not be pessimistic but rather be optimistic about the power of God unto salvation.