

HOW TO WIN FRIENDS
AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE FOR JESUS
ACTS 2:14-21

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

He grew up on a farm in Missouri and attended a one room school house. Later he went to a bigger high school. He had ambitions as a teenager. Part of those ambitions had to do with public speaking. He participated in the high school debate team.

After high school he went to a teachers' college. Then he went to work as a salesman, in which pursuit he experienced some success. But he had higher ambitions and applied to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York City. He was accepted there as a student and began to pursue an acting career. That did not really work out. He was living in the YMCA.

He had an opportunity there to teach a public speaking course and found success in doing that. His career began to take off. Things really took off when his book was published in 1936. (PROJECTOR ON--- HOW TO WIN FRIENDS) The book was entitled *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Dale Carnegie became a success. His book eventually sold 15 million copies. His speaking courses are still around today.

I have never taken the course. But I had a speech minor in college, and I was on the school debate team. (PROJECTOR OFF) I had become a Christian years earlier. In college I got more serious about the Christian faith and became interested in learning how to influence people for Jesus. I don't have a personality like the bold and brash Apostle Peter. I don't claim to be an especially great evangelist. But I recognize that I have a Biblical responsibility to be a witness for Jesus. I find in the passage before us this morning some helpful lessons about how to win friends and influence people for Jesus. Perhaps you will find them to be of benefit to you, too.

1.

The first thing that I find is that we need to GET PEOPLE'S ATTENTION. (PROJECTOR ON--- 1. GET PEOPLE'S ATTENTION) In our study of Acts we have seen that Jesus had told His followers to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In #1 v. 8 the resurrected Jesus declared, "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" That seems to have been both a command and a prediction. The rest of the Book of Acts describes how the story about Jesus went out from Jerusalem to the rest of the Roman Empire.

Shortly after giving these directions Jesus ascended into heaven at the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem. Two angels told the watching Christians that some day Jesus would return at the same place. Then at the beginning of Chapter 2 we saw last time that on the Jewish feast of Pentecost when lots of Jewish visitors were in Jerusalem this supernatural thing happened. The Holy Spirit came upon these gathered Christians, and they began speaking in the various languages of Jews who came from all over the Roman Empire. They were praising God in these languages which the speakers did not otherwise know. This got people's attention. They attracted a crowd.

In vv. 12 & 13 we read, **“And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ 13 But others mocking said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’”** So notice that it is really God who is involved in getting the attention of these people.

It is rare, if ever, that we will personally see such a clearly supernatural event which will get people's attention. But the Lord uses other things to get the attention of people. I suspect that there are people in Los Angeles in recent weeks who have lost all of their material possessions who may be asking questions about the meaning of life. On a personal level we encounter friends and family who have difficult personal challenges that get people's attention. My neighbor Maxie was a widow. When her health began to deteriorate, we had a chance to get involved in her life and talk about spiritual things. In the end I conducted her funeral.

We also get people's attention by simply living a consistent Christian life. Years ago I was worked in a manufacturing facility. I was there for only a week or so when one of my coworkers asked why I didn't swear. Most everybody did. That led to an extended conversation about my Christian faith.

Sometimes we need to take the initiative in getting people's attention. Sometimes as a church we offer special events or outreaches to get people exposed to the gospel. We have Christmas Eve services and fall festivals and widows' events and youth group stuff. A good place for all of us to start is to ask the Lord to give us good opportunities to be witnesses for Him.

2.

Secondly, we can be effective in influencing people for Jesus if we DEPEND ON THE HOLY SPIRIT. (PROJECTOR ON--- 2. DEPEND ON HOLY SPIRIT) The four gospels paint a picture of Peter being a brash and bold leader. But faced with opposition and separated from Jesus, Peter became something of a cowering wimp. He denied to a servant girl that he even knew Jesus. At the time of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, he ran away. Before the ascension of Jesus he seemed to be hiding out with the other apostles.

It is the coming of the Holy Spirit described in this chapter which seems to empower him with boldness. The New Testament, as I pointed out last week, indicates that every

genuine Christian has the Holy Spirit resident within him or her. He gives us a certain power to be witnesses.

In Ephesians #5 v. 18 (EPHESIANS 5:18) the Apostle Paul writes, “**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...**” Paul does not go on to give details about how to be filled with the Spirit. But we can make some reasonable deductions about what that involves. A comparison is made with drunkenness. How do people become drunks? Well, they often hang out with other drunks. They spend a lot of time with wine and alcohol.

In a similar way spirituality tends to be encouraged by hanging out with other Christians. It happens as a result of giving attention to God’s Spirit. How does that happen? It would seem to involve basics of the Christian life---- things like praying and reading the Bible. (PROJECTOR OFF)

In our passage Peter begins his witness with a sermon. I don’t get the impression that he spent the previous week writing up a manuscript to be delivered on this occasion. I don’t think that he had much of a clue about how this Pentecost thing was going to happen. So I suspect that there was a significant divine element involved in this presentation. He was truly empowered by the Holy Spirit. But he also had some material to work with. I think that he had studied and memorized the passages that he quotes from the Old Testament. Some of that may have involved his religious training as a kid in the synagogue in Capernaum. I suspect that he also had some help that came from training that he received from a rabbi named Jesus.

3.

The third lesson that I find here is that we Christians should KNOW WHERE THE AUDIENCE IS AT. (PROJECTOR ON--- 3. KNOW WHERE THE AUDIENCE IS AT) According to v. 5 the crowd which initially gathered was comprised of devout Jewish men. Many of them were Jews who had moved from other parts of the empire to have regular access to the Jerusalem temple. So these were people who knew the Hebrew Bible. When this miracle happens, Peter goes right to the Bible. It is the authority which they all recognize. Thus it becomes the basis for Peter’s presentation and explanation for what this phenomenon which they have witnessed is all about.

In our culture there are many who have some familiarity with Christianity and the Bible. The cults even have respect for the Bible. Muslims regard the Bible as a holy book from God. So with all of these people speaking from the Bible can be an effective basis for telling about Jesus and the gospel.

In our culture there is an increasing number of people who do not regard the Bible as a basis of truth and knowledge about life. So we have to look for other links as a basis of communication. Eventually we have to bring them to the Bible and to Jesus, but we can look for other ways to initially get their attention.

In Acts #17 Paul was at Athens. There were not very many Jews there. There were certainly very few people in Athens who respected the Hebrew Bible. The Greek city was known as a center of culture and education and philosophy. There were all kinds of idols and statues scattered around the place. So when he began his presentation in the marketplace there, he said, "Hey, I saw this altar which has the inscription 'to an unknown God.' Let me tell you about him."

Elsewhere Paul used sports analogies to connect with people. We have hosted a couple of car shows here on the church campus. They have let us do a devotional at the beginning of their program. I have talked about owners manuals and their importance in maintaining cars. I have compared that to the Bible in order to make a connection. The point is that we always need to look for connection points with the people around us to find an opportunity to make an effective presentation of the gospel.

4.

The next thing which I find that Peter does in this passage is DEFEND AGAINST FALSE CHARGES. (4. DEFEND AGAINST FALSE CHARGES) Back in v. 13 it was noted that a crowd of Jewish people was attracted to the noise and the languages which these first Christians were speaking. They recognized that something unusual was happening. Some of the critics accused the Christians of being under the influence of alcohol.

Peter responds to this charge in v. 15. He says, "**For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.**" The third hour of the day would be 9 AM. Some Jewish traditions said that good Jews would have the first meal of the day only after the time of the morning sacrifice. His basic point is that what is happening cannot be passed off as drunkenness.

One of the basic responsibilities of any Christian witness is to defend against false charges. In the second century some Romans heard second and third hand stories about Christians eating the flesh and blood of Jesus. They passed along these rumors that Christians were apparently involved in cannibalism. They were talking about Christian observance of the Lord's Supper, in regard to which Jesus had made a symbolic statement about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The secularists were not interested in making a serious investigation about what was going on. They were just interested in smearing the reputation of Christians.

Ironically some of the early Romans accused the Christians of being guilty of atheism because they did not believe in the Roman gods but rather in only one Jewish God. So the basic responsibility of Christian witnesses is to defend against false charges.

5.

The fifth lesson which is to be found in this passage which relates to being a good witness is to EXPLAIN BIBLICAL TRUTH. (5. EXPLAIN BIBLICAL TRUTH) The majority of our text is spent in doing that.

Back in v. 12 we are told that the crowd which gathered was amazed and perplexed about what they were witnessing. They heard and saw Jewish Christians praising God in their native languages. They did not know how to interpret this miraculous phenomenon. So Peter proceeds to explain from the Hebrew Scriptures what this means.

His audience was comprised of religious Jews. So they shared a respect for the Hebrew Bible. Some in our culture share this respect. Many do not. But our world has a lot of crazy ideas floating around. The Bible is true in its analysis of the human condition. The Lord has promised that His word conveys a certain power even with people who may not respect it.

Here Peter refers to the Old Testament prophet Joel. He is quoting from vv. 28-32 of the second chapter of his book. Joel was written in the eighth century BC when the southern kingdom of Judah was facing judgment for its falling away from the true God. The Assyrians were on the march and were threatening to invade Judah. Joel in his prophecy goes beyond this immediate danger to talk about a time in the distant future when all of the nations of the world are gathered against Israel for a great battle. What is anticipated is the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

Joel in v. 28, which is quoted here in v. 17, refers to an outpouring of God's Spirit. That is the connection which Peter is making to what the audience is now witnessing. So Peter quotes this Old Testament passage, saying, "**And in the last days it shall be, God declares,**

**that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
18 even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
20 the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord
shall be saved."**

The difficulty in interpretation has to do with Peter's introductory statement in v. 16 when he says that "**this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.**" There are at least three possibilities in understanding how we should interpret this quotation. The **first** possibility is to understand that Peter is saying that this prophecy is fulfilled in what has happened at Pentecost. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit accompanied by prophecy and dreams and visions and signs in the heavens and upon the earth has been fulfilled in this day.

There are several problems with this interpretation. For one thing it is hardly all flesh which has received the outpouring of God's Spirit. There were only 120 Christians who were gathered together. There is also no mention here in Acts or anywhere else of a darkened sun or a bloody moon or smoke happening on the Day of Pentecost.

Joel's prophecy is described as being fulfilled in the last days. This same Peter who is quoting this passage will later write something about the day of the Lord in his Second Epistle in #3 v. 10. (2 PETER 3:10) There he will later write, "**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.**" So Peter seems to think that the day of the Lord, mentioned in v. 20 of our passage, is still future. The Apostle John in Revelation #6 v. 12 speaks there of a darkened sun and a bloody moon which happens just before the return of Jesus to earth. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Those who hold to the view of future things known as amillennialism tend to favor this first interpretation. Amillennialism says that there is no literal future millennium. The idea that there will be a future thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth should not be taken literally. There will be no literal restoration of Israel to a prominent role in God's kingdom. So many of the amillennialists say that what happened at Pentecost was the fulfillment of God's prophecy in Joel.

A **second** interpretation says that what happened here is not really a fulfillment at all. Peter does not say that this is an actual fulfillment. He does not use that kind of language. He is perhaps saying that this is the kind of thing that happens when God shows up. Perhaps this is a hint, or a foreshadowing, of what will come about at the time of Christ's return to earth. This interpretation seems to be unlikely to me. In v. 16 Peter says that "**this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel.**" So this seems to be some kind of fulfillment.

So I am inclined to understand the **third** interpretation to be correct. This third view says that what happened at Pentecost was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, or perhaps the beginning of that fulfillment. Verses 19 & 20 seem to describe events that are also prophesied in the Book of Revelation concerning events that happen in the Tribulation shortly before the return of Christ to earth. It is then when there will be cosmic wonders in the sky and upon the earth.

The time before the first and the second coming of Jesus is the last days in the sense that there are no other events in the Biblical calendar that precede the Second Coming. There will be the Rapture of the church followed by a seven year Tribulation followed by the physical return of Jesus to earth to establish His kingdom.

During the seven year Tribulation the situation referenced in vv. 19 and 20 of our passage is described. (PROJECTOR ON--- REVELATION 6:12) Speaking about seven seal judgments the Apostle John sees this vision in Revelation #6 v. 12: "**When he**

opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood..." It goes on in the next verses to say that John saw the stars of the sky falling and islands and mountains being removed from their places.

There are other prophecies that associate these end time events with activity of the Holy Spirit. (ZECHARIAH 12:9) In Zechariah #12 vv. 9 & 10, for example, we read this: **"And on that day I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. (ZECHARIAH 12:10) "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him..."** This seems to describe a final battle that culminates in the return of Christ. Revelation #19 provides a New Testament description of this return.

So what we seem to have here is a prophecy that has stages of fulfillment. Here at Pentecost we have the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new way. This is part of God's new redemption program which involves the church, the body of Christ. (PROJECTOR OFF) Just before the physical return of Christ the Book of Revelation indicates that there will be a further outbreak of the Holy Spirit manifested in additional prophesying and miraculous deeds.

Peter was clearly a student of the Old Testament. He probably had learned a lot as a kid in Sabbath school. Later he had Jesus as a teacher. The lesson for us as Christian witnesses is that we have a responsibility to explain Biblical truth. Some of us will be better at it than others. But we all can have, and should have, a basic understanding of Biblical doctrine.

This same Peter would later write in his First Epistle (1 PETER 3:15) in # 3 v. 15, **"... but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."** So the lesson for us is to study the Bible. Do it on your own. Discipline yourself to have regular devotions. Take advantage of opportunities to participate in Bible studies.

6.

The sixth lesson that I find here from Peter's example of winning friends and influencing people for Jesus is to APPEAL FOR A DECISION. (6. APPEAL FOR A DECISION) Notice v. 21: **"And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."** Peter is addressing a Jewish audience which has knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures. He quotes it throughout this sermon. Ultimately he is working toward an appeal for these people to believe in Jesus. He will repeat this appeal at the end of his sermon.

In its original context the Old Testament prophet was warning of judgment coming from an Assyrian invasion. God was involved in this because the Jews had mostly turned

away from Him. Many of the prophesied judgments of God provide an opportunity for judgment to be averted if people turn back to Him.

So it is that earlier in this little Old Testament Book of Joel (JOEL 2:13) the prophet says this: “...**rend your hearts and not your garments.**’ **Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.** (JOEL 2:14) **Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?”** Joel seems to realize that most of the people of his generation will not turn back to the Lord. So he concludes #2 with these words: **“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.”** There is always a faithful remnant. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Peter in our story was appealing to Jews not just as individuals but also as a nation. If you turn over to Chapter 3, notice what he says beginning in v. 17: **“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”** Unfortunately the Jews as a whole did not turn to Jesus as their Messiah. As Jesus Himself recognized, judgment would come to this generation for its rejection of Jesus. In 70 AD the Romans wiped out Jerusalem and Judea. Israel disappeared from the earth as a nation. It was not reconstituted until 1948.

The goal of our witness individually and collectively is a decision to believe in Jesus. To do that we need to get people’s attention; we need to depend on the Holy Spirit; we need to know where our audience is at; we need to defend against false charges; and we need to explain Biblical truth.

The goal, Peter says, is to have people “call on the name of the Lord.” That is the method of eternal salvation throughout history. The content of that faith has varied. Today it is necessary to recognize that Jesus was the Son of God who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose again from the dead. We need to be rescued from eternal judgment.

Charles Spurgeon was a famous London preacher in the latter part of the 1800s. The daughter of Karl Marx interviewed Friederich Engels, who wrote the Communist Manifesto with her father. At one point she asked Engels whom he most disliked in the world. He replied: “Charles Spurgeon.” Such was the influence of this British preacher. He described this salvation deal in this way: **“The plain man’s pathway to Heaven, wherein every man may clearly see whether he shall be saved or damned.”** Such

is the responsibility that we have. Call on the name of the Lord, believing that Jesus will forgive your sins and provide you with eternal life.