

# Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



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## The Message and the Audience

Effective evangelism begins, not with a well-crafted message, but with a keen understanding of who we are trying to reach.

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mk. 16:15).

The mission of the Lord’s church can be summarized in that simple command, “preach the gospel to every creature.” We are the instruments through which God’s message of salvation is proclaimed to a lost world.

But the execution of that mission has proven to be not so simple. We must overcome all the obstacles of prejudice, ignorance, and even persecution to get the message into open minds who will respond. We are competing against a host of alternative belief systems that obscure the truth.

Yet there is a greater challenge to effective evangelism, one that is not as appreciated as it should be. To illustrate this challenge, consider a couple of examples from the book of Acts. When Peter preached the first sermon on the day of Pentacost in Acts 2, his theme was exclusively devoted to the resurrection of Jesus. He quoted extensively from the Hebrew Scriptures, using that as a foundation to build a compelling

case for what happened to the body of Jesus.

However, years later, when Paul preached in the city of Athens (Acts 17), his message was totally different. His main topic was the nature of God, not the resurrection of Jesus. He did not quote a single Scripture, but quoted one of their ancient poets, Epimenides, to buttress his case. His argument for God was based on their knowledge of nature and history, not Scripture or revelation.

Why did these two preachers preach such radically different sermons? *Because their audiences were radically different.* Peter was speaking to Jews who already believed in the true God and knew about Jesus. They just needed to be convinced of who Jesus was. Paul was addressing pagans who first needed to get their thinking about God straightened out. Peter and Paul were both working toward the same end (repentance, 2:38 and 17:30), but they had to take different routes to get there.

The contrast between these two sermons serves to teach us an important lesson in evangelism: Before we can

teach someone the gospel, we first need to understand where they are at in their spiritual lives, and adjust our message to fit their circumstances. If we try to take a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching the gospel, failing to account for the peculiar background of each listener, we will not be very effective.

In years past we could assume that most people we encountered were loyal to some form of sectarian Christianity, and approach them on that basis. That assumption is no longer valid. Today, we are more likely to encounter people who know nothing about the Bible, who are involved in a non-Christian religion — or no religion at all. Our teaching must be geared to reaching these people where they are at. It will require a great deal of study, research, and *listening* on our part, but there is no other way to effectively connect with them.

But be careful! No matter the audience, the end goal of all our teaching is to bring people to repentance through faith in the resurrected Christ. Whatever our beginning point, all our teaching must arrive at that common destination.

– David King